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THREE ROLLING STONES IN JAPAN

KARAKAMOKO-SAN.

THREE ROLLING STONES IN JAPAN

BY

GILBERT WATSON

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

THIRD IMPRESSION

LONDON
EDWARD ARNOLD
1904

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First Impression, September, 1903
Second Impression, December, 1903
Third Impression, January, 1904

DS810
W33

'Every book is, in an intimate sense, a circular letter to the friends of him who writes it. They alone take his meaning; they find private messages, assurances of love, and expressions of gratitude, dropped for them in every corner. The public is but a generous patron who defrays the postage.'—ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

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PREFACE

Scene: A new Restaurant. *Time:* The Dinner-hour.

JOHN BULL (*impatiently*). Hi, waiter! What is there to eat?

WAITER. Anything you like to order, sir.

JOHN BULL. Roast beef?

WAITER. Impossible, sir.

JOHN BULL. Beef-steaks?

WAITER. Don't keep 'em, sir.

JOHN BULL. Boiled mutton, then, and be quick about it!

WAITER. I am afraid, sir, that——

JOHN BULL (*indignantly*). Then, what the devil *have* you got?

WAITER (*nervously*). Shall I show you the menu, sir?

JOHN BULL. Hand it over. (*Reads*)

DÎNER LITTÉRAIRE.

MENU.

Potage.
Traveller's tale—Continental relish.

Poisson.
Odd fish—Cream of good fellows.

Entrée.
Savoury larks (from Eastern lands).

Rôti.
Merry thoughts of wandering birds.

Entremets.
Unlimited sweets.

Dessert.
No dates.

JOHN BULL (*aghast*). And you have the impertinence to call this a dinner?

WAITER (*nearly weeping*). There isn't much to eat, but if you would only try it, sir, I think——

JOHN BULL (*gruffly*). Well, bring it in and say no more.

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THREE ROLLING STONES IN JAPAN

CHAPTER I

SHANGHAI TO NAGASAKI

THAT I might one day visit Japan has ever been one of my most pleasurable anticipations.

From the hills of desire I have all my life looked down on the Promised Land—as depicted on teacups, as sung in comic operas, or as traced with more prosaic accuracy on the map of the world. The possibility of posing in the society of some deliciously unnatural lady, upon a semicircular bridge, seemed too bright a dream ever to come true. I often thought how I would enjoy making the acquaintance of the Japanese moon (a very superior satellite and by no means to be confounded with other and more ordinary moons) from the summit of some fantastic pagoda. It would be pointed out to me by a mothlike maiden, affectionate yet modest, whose very familiarity would be charmingly unfamiliar, and we would sit together and watch it soar upwards into the blue night lulled

by the songs of Japanese love-birds. My ignorance of natural history in these young days was only to be equalled by the verdancy of my affections.

Still, to return to Japan, everything appertaining to it has always affected me pleasantly. Even the little Japanese gentlemen whom I used to meet wandering about the streets of London were full of interest to me. The entire absence of expression on their unattractive faces coupled with the entire absence of their ladies gave me food for much speculation. Why would they trust us with neither ?

Japanese curiosity-shops, too, had a fascination for me. It was not the medley of curios which they contained that aroused my interest ; it was what I could not see, it was what I could but dimly divine, it was the soul that lay behind all this marvellous art—the genius that prompted the brain to conceive and the hands to create.

What wonder, then, that when the years bestowed upon me the choicest of their number—the young and hopeful twenty-one—I decided to start upon my travels, with Japan as the polar star towards which I would steer my outward-bound vessel.

And now, before I go farther (and two years are supposed to elapse between the time mentioned at the end of the last paragraph and the beginning of the present one), let me in a few words introduce my companions to the reader. Their names are

Kingston and Gordon. Friends of no long standing, but in the world that travels friendships mature more quickly than in the world that stays at home. We three, then, had come to know each other so well that I doubt if even the lapse of years could have added to our intimacy.

The God of Chance had presided over our meeting. It was to the pink and white terraces of New Zealand that I owed the pleasure of Gordon's acquaintance. A fight with a Chinese mob in the interior of the Celestial Empire was responsible for Kingston.

In character they were very dissimilar: Gordon —reserved, sensitive, cultured, in harmony with the refining influences of nature and art; Kingston —unconventional, boisterous, genial, in sympathy with many of life's most engaging materialisms. In spite of this dissimilarity, or it may be, possibly, on account of it, the loadstone of attraction had drawn us together. I think that, owing to my being able to sympathize with these apparently antagonistic traits, I proved a bond of union between them. I base my assumption on the fact that, talking it over with them one day, Kingston called me the 'missing-link,' a judgment in which Gordon fully concurred. I told them they flattered me. They assured me, however, that nothing was farther from their thoughts, but added that it was really 'very nice of me to take it like that!'

I cannot be too grateful for my good fortune

in finding such congenial travelling companions. If they ever chance to see this unpretentious account of our wanderings, they will, I am certain, forgive what must of necessity be a very imperfect description, for the sake of the pleasure I still feel when I recall those delightful days and the kindly comradeship which lent them more than half their charm.

The mid-day sunshine sparkled upon the river. The tide had turned, and we were off. Not a breath of wind ruffled the surface of the water. Even the blue pennant at our mast-head hung limp and motionless. As our steamer floated free of the wharf, the swarms of Chinese coolies seemed already like a part of some Oriental dream—unreal, evanescent. The long line of buildings, of which the inhabitants of Shanghai are so justly proud, receded slowly into the distance. Our last impression of China stands out pleasantly. We left it basking in the warmth of noon, brilliantly lighted up, full of colour, smiling to itself, as it were, under a cloudless canopy of blue. If one regret could have tinged our farewell to the land of the Celestials, it would surely have owed its existence to that hour ; to the enchantment born of intervening space ; to the quiet retirement of lustrous coast and sun-steeped hills.

It was delightful to lie beneath the canvas awnings, stretched in some luxurious deck-chair, and feel one's self spirited onwards into the unknown. Idleness at

such a season becomes more than ever a gift from the gods. To be idle gracefully, utterly, enthusiastically; to show not the slightest symptom of the fever of unrest; to eat the lotus with appetite untainted by indulgence in less delicate fare, is not force of habit so much as inherited talent. It is not to be acquired, though by dint of good-will and a little natural laziness of disposition you may deceive others and appear to be fairly idle—the really idle man is born, not made. And where does one find such a favourable field for the exercise of this gentle art as on board ship? All one's surroundings, from the captain to the cabin-boy, breathe a spirit of repose. The unreasoning activity of the engines is not an insult, as you might at first imagine, but a foil—one of those artistic touches of Nature wherewith she enhances the beauty of your calm and unruffled frame of mind by the trenchancy of contrast.

We three, then, were idle, or as nearly so as our individual natures could attain to. Nothing could be more enjoyable than to watch with drowsy interest the quaint shipping, beating to and fro on the broad reaches of the river. A Chinese junk is a curious contrivance. It has the air of having been discovered in a museum of antiquities, and launched only as a nautical experiment. Dinner was being served on some of these boats as we glided past. On the high after-deck we could see the semi-naked crew squatting in a circle. Boiled rice was their

somewhat monotonous fare. Junk dinners have one advantage, however, over more varied repasts: the 'menu' card need never be changed. It speaks well for the gastronomic constancy of the Chinese that their sailors, to use a metaphor, go into daily action with their 'menu' nailed to the mast.

In a few hours we passed over the bar, and, leaving the waters of the Yang-tze-Kiang behind us, headed for the open sea. It was wonderfully calm. The vast glassy plain lay motionless before us, streaked here and there with delicately tinted shades of light. A veil of heat hung and quivered in the radiant air. We overhauled a large sailing vessel which lay becalmed with clouds of snowy canvas stretched upon her yards. The sunlight caught the outspread brightness of her sails, and made them gleam again against the background of blue. Not a sign of life was to be seen about her, save a faint column of smoke rising from her galley fire and two sea-gulls circling and wheeling around her stern.

Was it possible for Nature to have paid our frame of mind a more delicate and graceful compliment? This vessel, was she not a visible touch of flattery? —for imitation, we are told, is ever the sincerest flattery. There she lay, just like us, steeped in the delights of *dolce far niente,*

'As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.'

* * * * *

It was night. One of the mates had just looked into the saloon, where we were reading, to tell us the welcome tidings that land was in sight. Leaving our books, we sought the deck. Myriads of stars bespangled the sky. The waste places of the sea looked weird in the wan light. Their loveliness was full of mystery. Our steamer glided on an even keel; no motion was to be felt save the faint vibration from the engines; we might have been at anchor, so steady were we, so smooth was our progress over the mirror-like surface which lay around us. The breeze caused by our swift advance raced by us; it brought us great draughts of air, cool and clear, the vintage of the ocean-gods drawn from the inexhaustible cellars of the sea.

Leaning over the taffrail, we gazed into the night. Nothing could be seen save the rim of the splendid circle which ever meets the eye upon an ocean-voyage, and even that, rendered indistinct by the obscurity of the hour, was enshrouded in a purple gloom. Where was the Promised Land? Had the officer been mistaken? But no! as we watched a brilliant light sprang into being, glowed steadily for a few moments, then vanished, swallowed up in night. We waited for its reappearance breathlessly. How long it seemed in coming! Again it shone upon us—a star of promise over the wonderland of the East—and again it was not, and a solid wall of

darkness hemmed us in anew. But we could not doubt it now—we knew it was there; and all that it meant to us of hope, of pleasure, of longing, found vent in the shout: 'A revolving light! The first outlying lighthouse of the Island Empire! *Japan!*'

CHAPTER II

NAGASAKI AND ABA

On the following morning the cessation of the steamer's screw awakened me at an early hour. Looking out of the porthole of my cabin, I caught sight of green hills and waving woods deluged in sunlight. Many lovely scenes have I looked upon for the first time framed, like dainty miniature paintings, by the charmed circles of cabin portholes. Novelty has a wonderful fascination for the human heart. The very mention of 'fresh woods and pastures new' excites our interest, and makes us long to revel in the possibilities for beauty which they may contain. Man clings to the old nomadic instincts in spite of the moulding forces of civilization. The days at sea, the tedium of the voyage, the never-ending beat of the screw, the never-ending sweep of the horizon, insensibly predispose us to welcome the distant land with a keener pleasure than we would feel had we approached it over a less monotonous element. Perhaps the principal charm of these little pictures is that, like real works of art,

their size is limited. The porthole is small; it may be possible to squeeze one's head through, but there exists a doubt as to the possibility of withdrawing it again, which, to say the least, is unpleasant to contemplate. The utmost that can be done is to stand on the bunk, and gaze at the tiny circle of novelty awaiting one beyond. It is like a peep into another world, or a glimpse into the magic mirror of the fairy-tale.

Hurrying over my toilet, I was soon on deck. It was a lovely morning. Our steamer lay at anchor in the picturesque and land-locked harbour of Nagasaki. The town is charmingly situated, the houses rising tier above tier as they recede from the blue waters of the bay. The hills which dominate it are beautifully wooded, and seen as we then saw them, with the flush of early autumn gaining an ascendancy over the colder shades of summer, they formed a spectacle of extreme loveliness. The sunlight sparkled on the gently undulating water; it flooded the little town, catching here a white wall, there a distant dome, and it lay like an aerial sea over masses of foliage still wet with early dew. The harbour was alive with craft of all sorts and sizes, from the stately man-of-war to the insignificant sampan. Two sea-gulls were disputing for the possession of a crust; the coil and curve of their movements as they swooped towards the surface of the water, and then, barely touching it, soared upwards once again, was the very poetry of motion.

The breeze had a delightful coolness in its touch, a gentle stimulant to exertion.

'Now for shore!' exclaimed Kingston when breakfast had been despatched.

On gaining land we were at once surrounded by a crowd of jinricksha men. They had seen us coming, and had organized a hasty plan of campaign. We were their lawful prey; the idea that we might be able to walk never entered their heads. They had a curiously motley appearance. Clothes seemed to be at a premium that morning. They all possessed flat straw hats, and straw sandals attached to their feet by a thong passed round the big toe, but in the matter of trousers they were singularly deficient. One or two overdressed individuals, the Beau Brummels of the jinricksha race, wore bathing-drawers of an antiquated pattern, but for the rest a wisp of cloth twisted negligently around the loins was deemed sufficient concealment of the natural man. After all, when one comes to consider it from a philosophical point of view, is it not purely a question of habit, of custom, of fashion? Modesty herself in Western lands scruples not to show you her pretty shoulders, although she professes to be extremely sensitive as to her ankles. There is no doubt that civilization is the author of her being, but I do not go the length of Kingston, who held that modesty is but the unnatural concealment of the natural.

But I digress. The little cars which were offered to us resembled miniature dogcarts with movable oilskin hoods. Their owners surrounded us on every side, and, in their eagerness to be hired, nearly came to blows. Kingston shouldered his way through them, and, with characteristic kindness of heart, chose a disappointed little man on the extreme verge of the crowd. The little fellow's gratitude knew no bounds.

To the majority of travellers the jinricksha is a novel mode of conveyance; there is something exhilarating about it. It awakes the boy in you, and you are prompted to shout aloud in very glee. The little car is so diminutive, so toylike, so far removed from the ponderous equipage of the Western world with which you are familiar, that you feel strangely out of place seated in its lilliputian arm-chair. The fear of breaking it is never far absent from your mind. And then, too, its owner—the human steed—is so akin to all that you have connected with childhood that you feel as if you and he were 'playing a game,' and a dreadful fear besets you that soon he will put down the tiny shafts and inform you that it is now your turn to be 'the horse.'

The idea of being beholden to a fellow-creature for the means of locomotion was at first repugnant to us. There was something humiliating in the very notion. Were we not men, too? Were we

not possessors of the same set of muscles—of a very inferior quality, it must be admitted, but, still, strung together on the same general plan? And yet there is no doubt that, had we been unexpectedly metamorphosed into ricksha men, we would have been incapable of a hundredth part of the strain to which their superb physique was subjected. The knowledge of this fact humbled us. We took our seats in the tiny carriages in an atmosphere of apology, and were whirled off, as it were, under protest.

I am of opinion that the absence of tail in the willing steed has much to do with this frame of mind. There are people whose conversation can be justified only by the possession of a tail; but to look for it in a horse and find it wanting is merely a gratuitous insult. You expect to see it. Your humane feelings are hurt should you imagine that it has been too closely 'docked.' But when it is entirely absent, erased, blotted out, 'docked,' as it were, past all recognition, you have a right to be indignant, and it is then that the preposterous, unblushing humanity of your steed strikes you with feelings of the utmost consternation.

But in the minds of our ricksha men these notions hold no place. I doubt if they were even conscious of our apologetic attitude or of our physical inferiority. If they were, they treated us with the usual courtesy of their race. When we knew them better, we found that they pocketed our money with

as much condescension as though we were by nature equal. True, they did not refrain from criticism. But, with a tact which would have graced a more exalted social position, they did not criticise our muscles, which were of a certainty inferior, but our clothes, which were beyond all doubt superior. Our boots were a theme for endless speculation ; our hats kept them in conversation by the hour.

Nagasaki impressed us very favourably. Everyone was busy. The joiner, the tailor, the provision merchant—all were hard at work. All sorts and conditions of shops stretched along the clean little streets. Straw sandals, paper umbrellas, rush hats, matting for coats, oil-paper waterproofs, grass great-coats, wooden clogs, paper lanterns, and many other quaint articles, were exposed for sale. Many of the workmen were singing gaily as they bent over their appointed tasks, while every now and then a burst of merriment from some tea-house floated out joyously into the sunshine. Even the beggars were jolly fellows, and smiled at us with a quite unprofessional cheerfulness. It is a curious sensation to be accosted by a hilarious hunchback who shows you his hunch as if it were the best joke in the world, or to have your attention drawn to poor sightless eyes only by the merry grin which stretches beneath them. They cannot help it : cheerfulness is inherent in the race. It is impossible to take

"Wonderful Japanese Ladies."

anything seriously in Japan; everything seems made on purpose to be laughed at.

To masculine eyes the most interesting objects were the girls. Very pretty they looked as they tripped past on their elevated sandals, or smiled to us from the doorways of their little homes. They were dressed in the quaint, artistic Japanese dress which by this time all Europe knows so well. The loose single garment of soft, delicately tinted material, fastened round the waist with the broad sash of some pale shade which is a colour-harmony in itself, and tied behind into a gigantic bow of truly grotesque proportions; the neck lightly powdered; the hair, jetty black, coiled in magnificent rolls, and harpooned with long pins; the almond eyes; dark lashes; little teeth and red lips—all combined to make such a charming picture that even a woman-hater could not but admire it; aye, and perhaps keep a little corner for it, long afterwards, in his cynical heart.

The women of the lower classes are still unconventional in their dress, and through the sliding panels we saw many of them with nothing on above the waist. Babies in a state of nudity tumbled about. The Japanese baby is a wonderful specimen of humanity. With its shaven head, round eyes, and preposterous solemnity, it reminds you of a grotesque ivory with the yellow polish of immense age upon it. Bret Harte's name for them—'Venerable impostors'—suits Japanese babies to a nicety.

As soon as one baby is able to toddle, it has the next one—which has put in an appearance in the interval—bound tightly on its back, and so on *ad infinitum.* As one author quaintly says: 'The rearing of a poor Japanese family is a perpetual game of leap-frog.'

To see these juvenile nurses staggering to and fro, trying to play whip-top or fly kites, each with a little brother or sister strapped behind, afforded us endless amusement. The tiny faces—'pensive even to sadness'—and bald heads, as of premature age, peeping over young nurses' shoulders and watching the game with silent gravity, always provoked laughter. Yet, even in the midst of such laughter, I could not help feeling that it was uncanny. If they would only cry, one would realize their helplessness, their youth, their humanity; but no, not a cry, not a sign of infantile impatience—nothing in the wistful faces but quiet resignation, but Oriental bending to the inevitable, with perhaps an unreadable thought or two lurking in the serious eyes.

Leaving the town, we climbed a mountain valley by a winding road. As we toiled slowly upwards, numbers of little hill-ponies driven by peasants passed us on their way to the town. They were hardy animals in spite of their diminutive size, and all bore heavy loads in large wickerwork baskets, their hoofs being encased in straw sandals to enable them to

climb the stony paths leading to the mountain passes.

Now and then a tea-house came into sight, perched on the hillside, commanding a glorious view away over the wooded valley to where the blue sea glittered in the sunlight. In front of these little dwellings, so suggestive of rest and well-earned repose, a spring bubbled into a wooden trough, the limpid notes of the running water tinkling pleasantly on the ear. The old woodwork, stained with the fresh greens of moss and lichen, housed many a dainty fern with whose fronds the water played as it rose and fell ceaselessly in its time-worn bed. These old troughs were the rendezvous of many wayfarers; around them picturesque groups of travellers were to be seen chatting pleasantly together, while their ponies drank the clear water or stood idly in the shade, flicking away the flies with their long tails.

At last the top of the pass was reached. What a magnificent view! Immediately below us the road wound in serpentine coils far down into the valley. In the distance a sedan-chair was visible, carried by a party of coolies; the whole procession dwarfed into miniature, yet looking so near that it appeared possible for a stone tossed from our lofty vantage-point to sweep it into space. Range after range of mountains rolled away to the horizon, their uplands rising tier above tier; their bases and the

valleys which gave them birth indistinct with blue shadows, brimful of far-off colour; while their summits stood out clear and sharp in the afternoon sunlight. A large lake—or was it an arm of the sea?—sparkled brightly far below. A hawk hung over it on outstretched wings, a mere speck against the infinity of heaven.

A deep sense of peace and calm, of dim remoteness, but vaguely seen through the shimmering veil of sunbeams, brooded over all. Not a sound was to be heard save the song of some unseen singer, and even that, softened by the distance, seemed to melt into the silent spirit of the scene, and to be but the audible expression of Nature's satisfaction at her own surpassing lovelinesss.

Passing through several villages, we finally halted at a tea-house in order to rest our coolies.

We were ushered into the guest-room, and sat down on the white matting of the floor, for furniture there was none. It was an *al-fresco* resting-place, for the walls had been pushed aside till the room consisted simply of an elevated platform with a roof over it.

The good lady of the inn was a stout, comely person, but married, which, as matrimony entails blackened teeth in this eccentric land, detracted considerably from her good looks. She hailed the advent of our arrival with shrill acclamation.

Running out of her front shop, she 'flopped,' down at our feet and bent before us in an attitude of the most respectful salutation. Then, before we had time to respond, she was up and away on 'hospitable thoughts intent.' Back and forwards she tripped in a perfect whirl of breathless excitement, each visit to the front shop resulting in the addition of more and still more tiny plates of fantastic indigestibles to the collection in front of us. There were raw eggs, little sponge-cakes, pickled radishes, curious sweetmeats, half-peeled oranges, *saké* or Japanese beer, and of course the whole inevitable paraphernalia of green tea. The mere idea of eating so many oddities gave us mental indigestion. In vain we protested; she only translated our protestations into a desire for more. I wonder what ogre of an Englishman with Gargantuan appetite had last visited her village? Famine must have inevitably followed in his footsteps. At last she desisted, and, standing at a respectful distance, surveyed us with a smile as large as her heart. A couple of dogs strolled in, and, seeing the feast, feigned surprise. It was our first real Japanese tea-party, and a right merry one it was. The sun shone joyously upon us—the very breeze chuckled at our jokes. We earned the approval of our jolly hostess. She did not understand us, but she could join in our laughter, and did too, with a hearty goodwill which made her plump figure shake again. With our legs tucked under us,

we picked at radishes and oranges, sipped *saké* and tea, utterly regardless of consequences, till even the hospitable heart of our hostess was satisfied and she allowed us to depart in peace.

Our coolies now suggested that we should visit Aba, a little village situated on the farther side of the lake. Gaining our assent, they drove us down to the water's edge, where we spent some time bargaining with an old fisherman to row us across. He was occupied in taking up his nets, but the prospect of earning a little money being more to his taste, we were soon afloat. The old man sculled lustily, and showed an amount of vigour surprising at his years. His face appeared to be carved out of mahogany, and was a record of every hour of sunshine and storm that had visited Aba for the past seventy years. There was something primitive about him— a return to aboriginal man — that would have delighted the heart of Thoreau. His few clothes looked like a natural covering, and moulded themselves to his stalwart form with as much appropriateness as lichen and ivy to the limbs of an oak. They appeared to have grown on him. The venerable punt in which we were seated was not the sort of craft we would have chosen for a pleasure trip It was half filled with water, in which at least a dozen mournful fish were disporting themselves. These poor captives were much alarmed at our intrusion.

We looked so unlike Japanese fishermen that they had just cause for apprehension. Our appearance was ill-omened: we represented the eating public, and filled their fishy minds with depressing thoughts connected intimately with breadcrumbs and tomato sauce.

On nearer approach, Aba proved to be the quaintest little village imaginable. Such poverty, such decrepit infirmities of houses, such picturesque misery, it would be hard to equal anywhere. Most of the dwellings were built on wooden stakes, which just saved them from a watery grave. They looked as if they had waded out into the lake long ages ago when they were young, and now that they were old they felt too infirm to wade back again. The whole place had the mildew of centuries upon it. Green ooze and lake-slime coated the wooden logs and draped the sun-baked walls with delicate green. The black roofs projected far over the water; here and there a broken beam or mass of dislodged tiles showed us a rent through which we caught sight of the comfortless interior. A dank smell of decay floated on the warm air. There was something very sad in this tiny collection of dwellings huddling together in the sunshine. All around was so beautiful, so fresh, so full of the joy of life—they alone were crumbling into ruin, looking from out their bleared window-eyes upon the lovely world, and perhaps thinking that the day was not far

distant when wall and rafter would totter downwards, and the water would receive them into its quiet depths. Houses see so much of human life that surely it is not wrong to impute a little human feeling to them.

The entire population of the little village had assembled to do us honour. A friendly curiosity was to be read in the many wondering eyes that watched our approach. I think that Aba could not come under the dominion of Cook, or Gaze, or any of the kings of travel, could not even be on calling terms with the unconducted tourist, but must lie off the beaten track, lost in the sunny valley-land behind the lonely lake. Otherwise we would surely not have been such food for marvel. The old-world, sun-steeped air of the place affected us drowsily. We sat down on the steps of the tea-house. Our new friends crowded around us in a respectful semi-circle, the little children being placed in the front, with that tender thoughtfulness for childhood which one finds in all places and in all lands. Tea was served by a band of little *mousmés*, a warm flutter of dainty colours and girlish laughter. It was useless to plead want of appetite as a reason for declining the butterfly meal, so little appetite is needed to sip the contents of the tiny cups and toy with their sweetmeat accompaniments. The juvenile world of Aba will remember that visit of ours as long as there is a child left to listen to the story. We charmed

their young hearts with our surplus copper coins. To judge from the excitement manifested, not only by the little ones, but also by the grown-up members of the community, coins, even of modest worth, must be rare indeed in Aba. Doubtless by this time we have become a copper legend—a local fairy-tale—and are bound to fascinate many a little listener when the charcoal glows in the darkened dwellings and the winter nights lie cradled in mist outside.

CHAPTER III

BY SHIMONOSEKI TO KOBÉ

To be on board ship after dark when the vessel is anchored within sight of shore is a pleasant experience. There is something strange in being thus isolated from the rest of mankind. It is a ship, yet it is not a voyage, for the engines are silent, and the long throb of the screw pulsates no longer from stem to stern. The waves wander at will, and play with the propeller as it lies half submerged in the water. They are forgetful of past injuries, or, rather, I should say, forgiving, for under cover of night they creep to the darkness of the steamer's sides and caress them with a musical murmur which comes pleasantly to the ear. The deck is lighted by a distant lantern. Now and then, aloft among the rigging, the wind moans a little, fitfully, uneasily, then dies away. A chorus floats from the sailors' quarters in the forecastle. Many lights can be seen twinkling from other vessels anchored in the bay; while from the distant shore a perfect galaxy of stars glows out, telling of the kindly habitations clustering

under the shadows of the hills. Above these cheerful indications of life and warmth, the sleeping woods lie lost in obscurity. Not even the general masses can be distinguished, not even the foliage fringing the sky-line can be made out; the imagination alone can picture them steeped in silence, with leaves still wet with the fine rain which fell during the sunset hour. Seawards, too, all is dark, vague, mysterious. Night broods over the waters. The Unknown waits to welcome one. Shipwreck and death may be lurking there, or perhaps only a sleep-canopy to be raised in the early morning when the dawn gilds the mast-heads with the promise of a perfect sky.

It was but five o'clock; the mists lingered over the sea. As the day dawned these nocturnal visitors became conscious of the finger of light pointing at them as though in derision. They grew uneasy, for as the moments passed, and the morning flush sprang upwards to the zenith, they wavered, trembled, and finally fled incontinently for the shore. They might have been the phantoms of wild animals haunting the water to slake their thirst during the silent hours, but impelled to seek the mountain fastnesses upon the approach of day. As they receded, the outlines of the coast of Kinshuih came into sight. Upwards and ever upwards rolled the mists, disclosing to view, first the township of Shimonoseki, then the woodland slopes above, and last of all the

rocky heights standing out, naked and hard, against the morning sky.

All night we had been steaming onwards in a northerly direction, till as day broke the narrow entrance to the Inland Sea lay before us lighted by the first rays of the sun. The chill of dawn was in the air. The surface of the water was calm and unruffled as that of a sheltered lake. The furrows of our steamer's track stretched away in long lines behind us; they had the appearance of oil, so oleaginous and undulating was their movement. A Japanese junk lay at anchor in the Bay of Shimonoseki. We passed it at the distance of a few yards, and remarked upon the exactitude with which its quaint outlines were mirrored in the looking-glass below. It appeared to be deserted, but as the undulations caused by our advance made it roll heavily, a head appeared above the dark line of bulwarks and gazed at us with dull apathy in its scarce-awakened eyes. A water-bird disturbed at our approach rose heavily into the air uttering a melancholy cry. But for this plaintive sound the whole scene might have been the fabrication of a dream. Recalled to its reality, however, by this wordless reproach, we could not but feel our position keenly. The advent of our arrival detracted so much from the calm and peaceful beauty of our surroundings. This cry was like the voice of Nature raised in protest against our intrusion. The bird

was at home here—we were strangers—he had a right to be indignant; and we watched the rise and fall of the speeding wings bearing him farther and ever farther away to some other and more secluded haven, with a feeling of sadness which even the sunshine was powerless for a time to dissipate.

Shimonoseki was left astern and we wound a serpentine course among the many islands that gem this inland waterway. As we glided onward they came into sight one after another, their shelving sides wooded to the water's edge. Little clusters of boscage they appeared, bestrewing the blue. Many of the lesser islets were gems of uninhabited loveliness, given over for the most part to a wayward entanglement, no trace of roof or track of man, nothing but a wilderness of wild-flowers, a wealth of leafage, and, here and there beneath the branches, a little strand silvering in sunlight. So pure the light, that every leaf and tiny twig stood out as but a yard away—so still the air, that the faintest sound was distinctly audible, the laps of waves upon the shore or at times an unseen bird trilling to itself in some bower of island foliage.

Other islands, of larger size, had been chosen as the site of fisher villages—little toy towns embowered in verdure, a huddle of dark houses dominated by a shrine. Nature—or was it Japanese art?—had mellowed the colours and sketched in the salient

outlines with unerring eye to pictorial effect. The weather-stained woodwork blended its dark hues with the background of various greens; and, as we watched, some touch of brighter tone, in the wearing apparel of one of the fisher folk—some scarlet sash it might have been—stole into the picture, and glowed for a moment till lost to sight in the distance. Each of the inhabited islands posessed a little harbour, and among the anchored junks and sampans we could see the fishermen mending their nets. The water was crystalline in its exquisite transparency. A lustral cleanliness and purity seemed to pervade its quiet depths, as though the sunlight were indeed the finger of deity touching it in golden consecration. Leaning over the steamer's rail, our sight penetrated far down into a silent and emerald-tinted world, where unknown fishes swam and where strange seaweed clung to the submerged rocks.

All that day we passed from delight to delight, grudging even the time necessary to partake of a meal. This Inland Sea was a fitting approach to the castle of our imaginations, the mansion of our hopes; and as the sun sank to rest, and the moon rose over the dark hills, we welcomed her clear light, for it appeared to us but as the lantern placed at nightfall, for our safe guidance, over the gateway of a friend.

CHAPTER IV

KOBÉ AND HIŌGO

KOBÉ is so full of pleasant memories that, pen in hand, I lie back in my armchair and know not where to begin.

As I ponder I catch sight of a comical little face laughing up to my own. The face belongs to a yellow oddity—god or devil I know not, but surely nothing earthly—a grotesque masterpiece of finely wrought ivory of a form fashioned only out of dream cobwebs, or out of the wonderful imagination of a Japanese brain. The laugh plainly says: 'Tell about me.' This leads me to shops.

Now, shopping in Japan is rarely done on foot, so our first consideration, after engaging rooms at the Hiōgo Hotel, was to hire three rickshas. I chose richsha man No. 1, or, to express myself with greater accuracy, he chose me. He was a most plausible individual, and rejoiced in the name of Tōmi. When he whirled down on me, leading the van of the ricksha charge which followed our appearance, I felt that his mind was made up. When he explained, at the pitch of his strong voice, that he

was the one honest man to be found in Kobé, I accepted my fate with resignation; I have always tried to consort with honesty. Gordon and Kingston were equally fortunate; by a strange coincidence each of us had happened to light on the one honest man in Kobé. Dishonesty, in the shape of fifty disappointed coolies, cursed our ancestors as we were whirled off.

Away we floated on the gay stream of city life, our little carriages, like gondolas, gliding along the canal-like streets, and dancing over the rapids of the more uneven thoroughfares.

'Where did you tell them to go?' I shouted to Gordon, as we gained on him owing to a slight block in the traffic.

'Nowhere,' he shouted in reply.

'Tell them to waltz round to the shops,' thundered Kingston, bringing up the rear.

'Shops!' echoed Tōmi in delight. 'Me know—all right;' and away we sped faster than ever.

All at once the ricksha shafts were unexpectedly 'plumped' down, and we narrowly missed falling on the necks of our human horses: the first shop was reached.

In the dark doorway stood two quaint little figures with hands on knees, bowing low in respectful silence. The interior was very dark. We followed them in slowly; it was impossible to move quickly as they retreated backwards, bowing at intervals.

'We have come to buy,' remarked Kingston

solemnly, as he sat down on the upturned face of a blue monster.

Gordon translated; then a scene of activity ensued. It was a curiosity shop in the most liberal sense of the term. Dickens would have revelled in the description of it; Balsac would have painted in its tiniest details, as he did in his inimitable 'Peau de Chagrin.' To tell of even half the things which were offered to us would fill pages; we could have fitted out a bride or an ironclad with equal ease; we could have furnished a lady's boudoir or a pagan temple without having to move a step.

I bought ivories; my laughing friend is a memento of that visit.

Gordon purchased old china; he was a connoisseur in antiquities of all sorts.

Kingston invested largely in devils; indeed, he afterwards boasted that his collection of devils would convert even the most stubborn unbeliever—to devildom.

Laden with our purchases we rattled away, only to stop before another and yet another temptation in the way of a shop, until our dollars and our time were exhausted and we gave the order 'Homewards.'

Oh, these amusing half-hours with the clever little Japs! how well I remember them: the smiling faces, the low, courteous bows, the pantomimes of inimitable gesture, the thin disguise of innocent

simplicity hiding the keen, shrewd, calculating brain which never allowed itself to be defrauded of a dollar—nay, not even of the fraction of a dollar! I remember, too, the little boxes, nearly as dainty as the delicate trifles which they concealed, enveloped in innumerable faded cloths, which always took a little time to unfold before one revelled in the artistic contents. Such a wonderful scent always hung about them, an almost indescribable Eastern odour, a perfectly Japanese smell which seemed to suit them all so well, and to give them, as it were, a characteristic atmosphere of their very own.

The other day, quite lately, in rummaging in a long-neglected cupboard, I found one of these silken wrappers. No one could have surmised its age. It must have been bright once, perhaps centuries ago, and there were still indications of a pattern sketched lightly on the faded background; but Time had passed his finger over it, blurring the outlines, and toning the once vivid colours to a dull monotony. It had grown very thin and frail during its many wanderings; its texture had become almost as diaphanous as a cobweb, or as one of the misty phantoms of Ossian, through whose semi-transparent bodies even the starlight could peep. But what I particularly want to mention is that the scent was still there. Nothing had taken it away, not even the contact with our Western odours, nor the long time which it had lain forgotten in the dust and darkness of the

old cupboard. Yes, the scent was still there; the subtle, aromatic odour had been nestling in the silken folds all the time. And as it filled the air with its silent suggestiveness of far-away lands, old memories came rushing back, and, laying fairy hands on me, swept me away through long years and over broad seas to Japan, and to the quaint little shop-keepers whom I remember so well.

We had very comfortable rooms at the Hiōgo Hotel. Our windows opened on a broad balcony, from which we could see an extensive panorama, embracing a foreground of streets, a middle-distance of harbour, and a background of sunlit sea. That balcony was a favourite resort of ours. In the early morning we would seek it before breakfast to drink in the chill breeze that blew down from the hills, and to wonder if the day would redeem the golden promise of the morning; in the sultry noon-day hours we were to be found there reclining in deck-chairs beneath a friendly awning, discussing our plans, reading, or writing, to an accompaniment of ricksha-traffic and in an atmosphere of Havana cigars; and best of all, when night had fallen and shadows lay over mountain and valley, we would come out into the cool air and watch the moon struggle through some cloud-rift till her light lay on the distant sea, and in a moment the ebon blackness was a tremble of liquid silver.

The animated scenes of city life which ebbed and flowed in the street below us, from long before daybreak until night was far spent, was to us a never-ending source of amusement. The quaint colours, the strange street-cries, the bright costumes, the startling incongruities, the Western touches in the Eastern picture, and the curious impression of unreality which they conveyed to our minds, never ceased to interest us.

Kobé is charmingly situated. It nestles confidingly against the purple slopes which ultimately rise in bold forest-clad uplands, and shelter it from the north winds. It is a busy little seaport town, full of the bustle and movement of commercial people. Perhaps the fact of its being in touch with the great business centres of the Westerm hemisphere may help to account for some of the incongruities to which I have referred. It was certainly a strain to one's risible faculties to see the Japanese dandy and the Japanese coolie side by side, the former equipped in frock-coat, silk hat, patent-leather boots, gloves, buttonhole, and silver-headed cane, the latter clad in the primitive simplicity of mushroom hat, straw sandals, and the merest wisp of cloth twisted round his loins. Civilization and barbarism rubbing shoulders—I think we preferred the barbarism.

It was a pleasant life that we led in sunny Kobé—day after day of wandering among strange scenes,

into out-of-the-way corners and unfamiliar places. Every excursion was a veritable voyage of discovery, undertaken in doubt, followed up with anxiety, carried to a successful conclusion with triumph and satisfaction. We felt ourselves to be three humble admirers of Columbus, following in his track, intent on the discovery of new worlds. And if we earned none of the glory associated with the name of that great man, we at least shared some of the more pleasurable of his feelings, and that is saying much.

For me, this 'triple alliance' was perhaps a more enjoyable experience than for either of my companions. I had travelled much alone, often being for months at a time with no one to whom I could speak as to a friend; now my good fortune had guided me into congenial society, and that, too, in a land full of interest and charm, full of novelty and amusement. What wonder, then, if my memories are rose-tinted—what wonder if, glancing back as I do through an intervening veil of years, my eye rests only on sunlit spaces, oblivious of the shadows that lie between?

It was satisfactory to find the three honest men of Kobé always in waiting for us, for we hired them by the week. Diogenes is said to have searched long in Athenian streets with his lantern for an honest man: it is a pity he did not first try Kobé. He need only have stepped out of the Hiōgo Hotel, and

he would instantly have found, not one, but *three* honest men awaiting him in the jinricksha stand. Embarras de richesses! And the beauty of the situation would be that, instead of Diogenes having all the trouble of looking for them with the inadequate aid of a Grecian lantern, they would actually come and look for him! What am I saying? Not only look, but fight—aye, to the death if need be—as to which third part of incarnate virtue should bodily seize him, ricksha him, and disappear with him in a cloud of Japanese dust—after the manner of the goddesses of antiquity when they wished to carry off some especially-favoured mortal!

The appearance of Kingston's coolie was certainly remarkable. His plump body, swathed in innumerable blue bandages, always suggested a surgical operation; his feet, bandaged to match, pointed in different directions, evidently disagreeing about which road to follow. Unlike the other members of the trotting fraternity, his face was mapped out by none of the little boundary lines of old smiles, the crumpled curves of bygone laughter, but smooth, sleek, and solemn, it stretched from ear to ear, a very monotony of becalmed expression. Still, some sense of humour was lurking beneath these blue bandages; it was never seen, it lay too deep for that, but it was occasionally heard, for after some more than usually preposterous joke we were startled

by a muffled 'Haw! haw!' which died away in shamefaced silence should we happen to glance in its direction. Nature did not intend him to be a ricksha man; he made us feel that he only ran under protest. His manner of receiving payment invariably made Kingston uncomfortable, for he pocketed money as less virtuous men would pocket an insult.

There is much of interest to be seen in Kobé and Hiōgo. Besides the shops, there are the temples, to which your ricksha man insists on taking you. His excuse is that he wishes to pray, and is certain you would like to follow his example. At first we did not understand the daily fascination of temples for the coolie soul: now we know—there is always a tea-house next door. The number of times we were wheeled into courtyards, deprived of our shoes, and made to suffer many other indignities, and all apparently for the working out of coolie salvation, surpasses belief. We felt so righteous when we saw them praying, and reflected that we were paying for all this religion 'by the week,' that we were sure we deserved some reward, so away we used to slip and partake of lemonade and laughter, tea-cakes and tea-girls, for the modest sum of thirty cents. This innocent little deception on our part was carried on successfully for some time, until one day our eyes were opened to the guile of the Japanese ricksha

man. We were accidentally shown into a room where, to our amazement, we found our three Pharisees, whom we imagined wrestling in Japanese prayer, actually pandering to the carnal lusts in the shape of drinks and tobacco! They pretended not to recognise us, but I observed that for the future temples were avoided.

CHAPTER V

A BATHING ESTABLISHMENT

'LIKE see bath ?' suggested Tōmi.

'Bath ?' I repeated doubtfully. I did not know if Tōmi's joyous nature was capable of irony. Was this apparently innocent suggestion guilty of a double meaning ? Was he insinuating in his naïve Japanese way that a bath might do us good ? Or was his remark only a form of humour, adapted to the needs of an advertisement, after the manner of 'Good-morning ! have you used Pears' soap ?' I wronged him.

'Yes, yes. Plenty big bath,' he continued. 'Japanese bath-house. Thinkee you like—velly nice look see.'

Gaining our consent, the three coolies whirled us off at a rapid pace.

'Is it far ?' I shouted to Tōmi.

'N-o-o,' he panted back. 'One street, two street, me thinkee five minutes do heem.'

Away we went, splash, splash bump, bump ! It had been raining steadily all the morning hours, and

the water lay in the hollows of the uneven streets. The gutters were little brooks for the nonce, and gurgled gaily past us. The overhanging eaves collected the last raindrops, which chased each other along the dark woodwork like gleaming strings of pearls. The sun shone out as we drove along, and flung handfuls of glittering jewels across our path. The streets were crowded, for this noonday hour was the busiest of all the twenty-four, and we were obliged at times to slacken our pace to allow some heavy rice-cart, dragged by coolies, to creak past us.

Tōmi's idea of time was eccentric, to say the least of it, and the promised five minutes had expanded into a full quarter of an hour before he came to a stop. His stops were always full stops—he knew nothing less abrupt; they were his only idea of ricksha punctuation. They imparted a thrill of excitement to the drive. I often passed my time in looking for them—I was invariably unsuccessful; but though I never found them, they always found me—unprepared.

'Bath-house!' shouted Tōmi suddenly.

The curbstone was very hard. I felt vindictive. But he never realized how perilously near he came to losing my distinguished patronage; sitting on the floor of his ricksha, he mopped his streaming countenance with his red ricksha-duster, humming a little Japanese love-song the while. Really, it was

impossible to be angry long with such a ridiculous personality.

When my friends joined me, we approached the building by a narrow lane which isolated it from the main thoroughfare. A piece of coarse matting was suspended in front of the entrance, and did duty for a door. As we drew this to one side, we brushed against two girls who, having had their daily bath, were on their way home. Very fresh and clean they looked, their modest upper garments folded neatly across their girlish bosoms so as to show the broad hem of a quaint colour to the best possible advantage. Their coils of black hair were still wet where the water had sprinkled it. We stood on one side to allow them to pass, a politeness which they acknowledged with bows of much ceremony. Chatting and laughing gaily, they stumped away down the ill-paven lane, their wooden sandals making a clatter, clatter, until they were lost to sight.

Passing the matting doorway, we entered the building. How dark it was! At first our eyes—accustomed to the brilliant sunshine which flooded the outer world—could with difficulty distinguish even the bare outlines of our surroundings. But after a moment or two we became familiarized with the dim interior in which we found ourselves. It was a large room or, more properly speaking, hall, with stone-paved floor, in which numerous baths of considerable size had been hollowed. The air was

hot and heavy with the steam which rose from the heated water. The same Japanese odour, which I have had occasion to mention before, was very perceptible; here, however, it was not dry and musty, but damp and clinging, as if it had taken visible form, and floated through the air on vapour wings.

On the morning of our visit the baths were well patronized. There were many bathers of both sexes, all innocent of clothing. Some were immersed in the steaming water, their heads alone being visible; others were standing knee-deep, engaged in their ablutions, or performing helpful little attentions of an ablutionary character to such of their friends as happened to be in need of them. A few were standing on the edges of the sunken baths, chatting with each other in subdued tones, passing the minutes pleasantly until such time as, the cooling process being complete, they would be at liberty to resume their clothes. The utmost propriety and decorum presided. But while the orderly behaviour and courteous manners of the bathers impressed us pleasantly, still, we could not help feeling thankful that we, at all events, lived in a world of clothes. And apart from ethical considerations—apart, even, from the fact that they deprive one of the personal luxury of seclusion—surely these public bathing-houses are not without a pernicious effect

upon the public taste. To me they seemed an artistic failure. Nothing is more beautiful than the human form, be it of man or of woman, in the heyday of its perfection, when symmetry of curve and fulness of muscle endow it with the glory of the statuesque; but what about the downhill of Life? what about the inevitable 'last stage of all'? Nature surely does not intend her imperfect or worn-out works to be exposed to vulgar gaze, but, rather, sanctions the use of draperies to conceal the physical frailties of poor humanity. I think that not the least reprehensible phase of the matter lies in the treating of these bathing-houses as a place of amusement, an inexpensive peep-show, where the traveller can while away a few minutes in the indulgence of unholy curiosity. If I were one of these bath-loving people, I should resent the vulgarity of the intrusion. We felt ashamed that we had thrust ourselves thus rudely on their privacy. But, then, was it wholly our fault? Were we aware of the extremely private nature of the sight we had been invited to witness? Was it not Tōmi who had played the part of tempter with all the blandishments of the Woman, all the subtlety of the Serpent? Had not the apple been offered to us with such seductive phrases as: 'Thinkee you like—velly nice look see'? Tōmi, the arch-fiend, who had lured us into this third-rate bathing establishment — who had wantonly

prostituted the modesty of his fellow-citizens, male and female—and all for what, forsooth? that he might pander to his inherent laziness by stealing a little unnatural slumber in the seat of my jinricksha! Our blood boiled! No, *we* were not to blame! Tōmi was the culprit! Tōmi should have known better!

CHAPTER VI

THE YOSHIWARA OF HIŌGO

FOREMOST among the travel pictures that still cling to my memory stands our visit to the Yoshiwara of Hiōgo. I wonder what it can be that endows past scenes with the power of living again in recollection. The chain of association is in many cases so slight, so illusive, so apparently trivial, that a wandering perfume may summon it into life, or an unexpected sound recall it from oblivion. Yoshiwara—what a charm lies in the name! How daintily outlandish it sounds! how suggestive of far-away lands! And yet, in spite of the endearing syllables, the name awakens a feeling of sadness, for to the initiated it brings back the memory of one of the saddest scenes that it is possible to witness.

Our visit to the Yoshiwara took place one night when, dinner being over, a drive was suggested as a pleasant way of passing the evening. Our three ricksha men always awaited us in the ricksha-stand which was to be found at a short distance from our hotel. The night was dark, not a star peeped

through the masses of drifting cloud which obscured the face of the sky. The street was nearly deserted ; occasionally, however, a ricksha would dash past, and in the faint light shed by its swinging paper lantern we could distinguish the dark outline of the trotting coolie. In the bay many lights twinkled out of the darkness, the nearer ones flitting landwards along a starry path, the more distant being mere pin-points receding farther and farther into the night. A strong odour of brine blew in from the sea, imparting a saline sensation to one's lips.

There was no mistaking the Yoshiwara when once reached, for it lay—an oasis of light—in the midst of the gloom that enshrouded the rest of the world.

We had passed through a series of impressions before arriving at our goal which had prepared us to perhaps overestimate the cheering influence of its brightness and animation. The comparative obscurity of the silent streets along which we had driven, the feeble flicker of the occasional lights which twinkled out of the pervading darkness, the sadness and abandon which hovered over the rows of deserted houses and lurked in the gloom of the suburbs—all imparted an intangible feeling of depression, causeless, perhaps, but none the less real to the imagination, which vanished like a nightmare before the cheerful and almost morning light of the Yoshiwara.

Leaving our rickshas to await our return, we strolled leisurely forwards, making our way with

difficulty among the crowds of people who thronged its streets. The houses were larger, handsomer, and better kept, than in other quarters of the town. The frameworks of the lower windows had been removed, and in their places were networks of slender bamboo rods, giving the many little rooms quite the air of rows of cages placed side by side in countless number. In their interiors a curious but saddening sight was to be seen. Upon embroidered cushions and strips of Oriental carpet were seated young girls. Each one was richly dressed in Japanese style and in the most expensive materials. Silks and satins of lovely hues and quaint devices were everywhere to be seen—costumes which long afterwards would probably find a ready market in London and Paris among wealthy ladies, and be admired for their beauty in many a Western boudoir. Paint and powder had been at work. Every complexion owed its delicate shading—from purest white to faintest pink—to the pencil and the puff. The lips were coloured with a scarlet dye, and even the almond eyes had not escaped the art which sought to improve upon Nature. In the rolls of dark hair, so carefully oiled and waxed, long silver pins had been thrust, their heads resembling dragons and other fanciful monsters. All that Japanese mind could imagine or that Japanese art could devise had been freely lavished on these charming interiors. The artistic shops of Hiōgo had been ransacked to

furnish them in appropriate style. The matting was of the whitest, the cushions and carpets were of the richest and softest, and even the walls were inlaid with exquisite panels of golden lacquer adorned with marvellous fancies and impossible dream-impressions. Powerful reflectors flung concentrated light upon each of the little rooms, so that not even the tiniest detail of the occupants could escape the eyes of the spectators. The ages of the girls might possibly range from fifteen to twenty-five, though it appeared to me that the younger predominated. As they were so 'done up,' all the complexions were the same, all the wonderful constructions of hair were alike, all the costumes were equally beautiful. Still, here and there the eye rested pleasantly on one with more perfect features or more graceful form than her companions. Their behaviour was guarded: the etiquette of the Yoshiwara is strict upon this point. Not a glance nor a smile is allowed, not a gesture, which might attract the attention of a passer-by. As far as the casual stranger is concerned—viewing it only from the street—nothing quieter, or more decent, could be imagined. There they sit, hour after hour, in all the dreary monotony of Yoshiwara life. The long lashes are modestly cast down, and the wistful little faces are turned to their trivial occupations, apparently quite oblivious of the crowds which surge and press against the bamboo bars all night long.

Some are smoking dainty silver pipes, which they fill and refill ceaselessly, while the slender puffs of smoke which each pipeful allows curl lazily up and float overhead a moment before they vanish into the night. Others are engaged in embroidery, but the work often falls listlessly from the fingers while the fair seamstresses exchange whispered remarks with their companions. As we look, one of them reaches out an arm for a tiny silver powder-box, and, consulting a miniature mirror, daintily touches her little retroussé nose with the puff, very lightly, with one deft, graceful pat like a kitten killing a fly; another consultation in the mirror results in a quick, artistic deepening with a coloured pencil of the carmine on her lips.

There was no hesitation or shyness shown in the practice of these essentially feminine arts before so many strange faces, all peering silently through the intervening barriers. Why should they feel shy? It was the custom. Everyone knew it. And perhaps the keeper, inside there, might be watching them, and would certainly treat them harshly if there were a flaw in the elaborate painting to attract his attention.

Lingering behind the others, I stood for some moments gazing at one of the girls whose appearance fascinated me. It was not that she was more beautiful or more richly dressed than her companions, or even that she tried to excite the

wandering admiration by a more modest demeanour or bright colouring—it was her expression. She was sitting on a cushion in the full light of the lamps, looking outwards through the network of bamboo. Her face haunted me for long afterwards.

Her *samisen* (Japanese banjo) was lying at her feet; one of the strings was broken, but she did not care: she had not the heart to play. Poor broken-hearted love-bird! Poor little soul of a dead nightingale! Was she dreaming of her childhood's home; of the village in the distant glade; of the dear, familiar faces; of olden times when life meant not shame and sorrow, but innocence and joy; when love sang, not to the strains of *samisen* music, not to the tinkle of yellow gold, but to the flutter of girlish hopes, the far-off prattle of baby voices?

The sound of music stole on the ear. Every room had at least two performers on the *samisen*. The whole street tinkled with melody, the eccentric sounds forming a monotonous accompaniment to the crooning of interminable love-songs. These curious love-songs sounded melancholy to us—there was so little real love in them. They made us feel sorry and ashamed—sorry for the quaint little singers, and ashamed that we had come to watch them out of mere idle curiosity, as if they were so many wild beasts instead of so many erring human souls.

To realize the impression that this scene made on us, the reader must imagine, not a few houses and

rooms only, such as I have described, but whole vistas of them—streets upon streets deluged in light and echoing to the strains of *samisen* music. In every one of these houses there were young girls; before every one the restless crowd elbowed its way. On and on they stretched, until the lights died out before the peaceful purity of the country where cicadæ sang and autumn mists lay lightly over sleeping fields.

Nature drew her black curtain closely around this flaming spot, as if she hoped to cut it off, with its sin and its shame, from companionship with her stainless children.

CHAPTER VII

TEA WITH TŌMI

'An invitation!' shouted Kingston, as he burst into Gordon's room at the Hiōgo Hotel with his usual eruptive energy. Gordon and I looked up. We were engaged in writing letters destined to catch the homeward mail.

'Who from?' I queried.

'Tōmi!'

'No! What does he want?'

'Oh, he stopped me in the street just now, and asked me, with a selection of Japanese smiles, if we would honour him by drinking tea this afternoon with Madame Tōmi and the Misses Tōmi.'

'And you replied?'

'Why certainly, my boy. I hear there is one pretty daughter at least, and if *you* are in luck there may be two. Gordon will be very useful with the mother.'

At three o'clock that afternoon we might have been seen careering along the Kobé streets, our hospitable host and his comrades speeding the coming guests to the banquet. Tōmi was indeed

in splendid 'form' that afternoon. Hospitality is evidently a strong stimulant to physical exertion. His dexterity in shaving curbstones with the fine edge of a ricksha wheel kept me in a perpetual state of melancholy anticipation. His 'view-halloo' as he swerved from the straight line of his track to threaten absent-minded dogs and defenceless old ladies was a noise to remember afterwards in nightmares. There was a strong back-wash of fear and indignation trembling in our rear. At last he relaxed his pace. I drew a deep breath and felt thankful.

In spite of Kingston's happy optimism concerning the daughters, I felt dubious. I inspected Tōmi closely when his attention was attracted in the opposite direction, and endeavoured to discover some indications of hidden beauty in his face, but it was too well hidden. There was no denying it: he was very, very ugly. Still—and at the thought cheerfulness again returned to me—Madame Tōmi might possibly be pretty, or the girls might have been endowed by the laws of heredity with every charm; they might possess some lovely ancestress. One should always be hopeful.

We were in a little lane that turned off at right angles to the main street.

'Me house,' observed Tōmi, waving his hand gracefully to emphasize the ceremony of introduction.

'That!' I ejaculated, in awestruck admiration.

Tōmi could scarcely conceal his satisfaction. Clasping his plump person in both arms, he gave himself a squeeze of silent ecstasy. It really was a charming little dwelling, and so much better than our imaginations had led us to expect that we could only gaze at it in astonishment. Our host enjoyed our surprise immensely.

'Ha!' he shouted at length. 'Velly glad you thinkee nice house have got. You come see.'

We answered that we would 'come see' with pleasure, upon which he preceded us up an approach of five yards in length.

We were met at the door by a rosy young girl, whom Tōmi introduced as his eldest daughter—Karakamoko San (San is merely an affix of politeness, meaning Miss). This sounds very large and imposing, but, as Kingston remarked afterwards, there was hardly enough of her to justify such a name. I do not think she was more than seventeen; round, dimpled, dainty, with a comical little pussy-cat's face; almond eyes, opening on the world with an air of wondering merriment; white, even teeth which, when she laughed—and that was her normal condition—looked like a row of seed-pearls; adorable little hands, chubby and soft; and quite ridiculously small feet, which turned inwards as she stumped about on her high wooden sandals. Her complexion was fair, with a touch of rose in her

cheeks, the jetty blackness of her hair, eyelashes, and eyebrows making it appear even fairer than it was. The chief charm about her was her freshness and wholesomeness, an almost fastidious cleanliness both in person and dress.

Seen as we saw her first—standing framed in the dark doorway of Tōmi's house—she made one of the prettiest pictures that can be imagined. Her quaint Japanese dress, opening low on the breast, showed off her plump neck and the graceful curve of her shoulders. The wonderful hair, the broad sash, the almost grotesque bows and puffs, the impossible sandals, the easy, natural pose, with one little hand resting on the weather-stained lintel, and the smile of welcome which seemed to include us all, each was an artistic touch which we would not have missed for the world, and without which the 'study in Japanese life' would have been incomplete.

Dear little Karakamoko San, how well I remember you! Sweet little Japanese maiden, your merry laugh still rings in my ears; it seems but yesterday that I heard it, and yet many a long year has flown since those delightful days of wandering in the Land of the Rising Sun.

I shall omit the San, for, to quote a recent playwright, the Miss, used in connection with such an unconventional maiden as Karakamoko always appeared to us a piece of 'unnecessary red-tapeism'; and, truth to tell, we felt on such friendly terms with

her from the very first that we never used it. When Karakamoko, then, observed us, she tripped down the steps, and said, smiling :

'You Engleeshmen? Me speakee Engleesh. How you do?'

This astonished us ; we had not expected to find such high-class education in the daughter of Tōmi the ricksha man. She laughed pleasantly—a fresh, tinkling laugh that was good to hear—and, holding out a chubby hand, said :

'You likee shake of hand?'

The fervour with which we all accepted the invitation was a sufficient answer. Indeed, Kingston, I regret to say, monopolized the little hand for such an unwarrantable length of time that we were obliged to call him to order.

'Me takee off shoe?' was her next unexpected remark, and before Gordon could prevent it she had knelt down and was busily engaged in unravelling the knots of his boot-laces. His expostulations were in vain ; she was evidently accustomed to get her own way. When we were all ready, and our boots had been deposited on the doorstep, we followed Karakamoko into the dainty dwelling, Tōmi having preceded us in order to prepare his better-half for our visit.

It was a charming interior. Spotless cleanliness everywhere. The white matting, the delicate woodwork, the paper panes in the movable walls, the

broad expanse of immaculate ceiling, all were as fresh and bright as if they had been made but half an hour ago. A faint, aromatic smell of Japanese tobacco pervaded the room. A paper screen, on which was painted the usual impossible scenery, stood in one corner. From a recess a household Buddha smiled down upon us, with the mysterious bronze smile which always struck me as strangely superhuman in its serene indifference, the calm, downcast eyes appearing to be fixed on futurity, the whole attitude and expression telling of a quiet abstraction from the present, of a conscious waiting for something, vague, far-off, but which was certain to come some day. Through an open panel I caught a glimpse of green leaves, and higher still there was a glint of luminous sky.

A vase with a tall, graceful neck, from which drooped a feathery chrysanthemum, stood before the god. An old woman sat in front of the screen—such a fat old lady! Barnum would have pounced on her at once, gleefully. But could he have moved her? I doubt it. Her complexion was a wonderful piece of colouring—evidently all her own—even a rouge pot would blush to perpetrate such an amateur piece of work. Her chin—but no, I cannot say *chin*: I cannot speak thus disparagingly of Nature's generosity—of the merry ripple of chin cascades which adorned the throat of our hostess. There was a ridiculous likeness to Karakamoko in the old

lady. Could one imagine Karakamoko rolled out, and matronized, and draped all round with stones upon stones of 'too, too solid flesh'—I say, could one imagine all this, then one might realize Mrs. Tōmi. I found myself wondering, 'Will Karakamoko ever be——' The sentence was never completed; the utter sacrilege of the idea made me shudder.

'Wife!' said Tōmi proudly. His air was superb; it said as plainly as possible: 'There, gentlemen, have you seen anything to beat *that?*' We all three bowed profoundly. The mountain heaved, grew very red, then—collapsed. Gordon hastened to console her; what he said I know not, but the effect was soothing, for a relieved look spread slowly over her face, and she giggled feebly. Karakamoko whispered to us confidentially:

'Too muchee flesh; no can do.'

This caused Kingston and me to be seized by one of those agonizing laughs which appear to owe their existence to the difficulty that is found in suppressing them. The old lady caught us in the act; fortunately, she took our merriment good-naturedly, for she bubbled over at once with a muffled hilarity which set all the chins aquiver.

Tōmi made a speech, smiling all the time and occasionally stopping to bow or slap his legs. I regret that I cannot give it in the vernacular. The subject-matter, however, was our noble selves. Gordon tried to save him from the fate of Ananias;

but Tōmi felt that he knew the bronze Buddha in the recess too well by this time to fear any inconsiderate interruption on his part.

How long he might have continued if left to his own devices I shudder even to think ; fortunately, Karakamoko drew him aside and whispered in his ear. Away he trotted, and presently returned with three black velvet cushions which he arranged immediately in front of his wife. On these three cushions we took our seats with great solemnity and looked at the old lady. What was she going to do ? Taking up a long pipe which lay beside her, she rolled a little ball of fine snuff-like tobacco between her forefinger and thumb, dropped it daintily into the tiny bowl, lit it, puffed once to assure herself that all was well, then presented the pipe with a smile to Kingston.

This *was* an honour ! Neither Gordon nor I would have deprived Kingston of that honour for worlds.

The poor fellow shuddered—'Great Scot!' I heard him exclaim under his breath ; he took it, however, heroically, inhaled a cloud of smoke, choked painfully, and we were obliged to thump him on the back before he was able to speak. His eyes filled with tears.

'Very nice—*Arigato !*' (Thank you) he gasped. Some lies are almost too beautiful to be fathered on the devil.

'Our turn next,' I whispered to Gordon—another little tobacco-ball was in process of preparation.

'No escape,' he groaned back.

He was mistaken! Our good angels did not desert us, for at that instant a noise was heard outside—a peal of girlish laughter followed by the shuffling sound of approaching sandals—and in another moment two rosy *mousmés* tripped into the room.

We sprang to our feet.

'Me sisters,' explained Karakamoko, adding confidentially: 'Hot bath have had.'

'Hot bath' must have but enhanced their prettiness, for a more charming pair you could not wish to see.

We all bowed; but we were not prepared for the consequences. Both girls fell on their knees and, bowing profoundly, touched the white matting with their foreheads.

'All very well for them,' whispered Kingston. 'But, I say! we can't do that; we've not had a circus training.'

'Must we follow suit?' I asked Gordon anxiously.

Karakamoko overheard me.

'No, no,' she said, shaking her wonderful chignon at me. 'Japanese girl likee bow; you no fuss; all right.'

Still, we found it embarrassing. We offered to assist them to rise, an attention on our part that caused them infinite amusement.

Such a merry trio the sisters made! The new-

"Ridiculously like Karakamoko."

comers were duplicates on a smaller scale of Karakamoko : the same hair, dress, sandals ; the same baby-air ; the same effect of being connected temporarily with a Christmas-tree, of belonging to the doll family of some larger and more grown-up little girl, of having wandered out of some toy-shop when the shopman was otherwise occupied. I found myself wondering if sawdust played an important part in their internal economy, and if they could really be undressed at night when one wished to put them to bed. But if they had the appearance of dolls, their manners, at all events, were far different ; indeed, a more lively and vivacious family it would be hard to find anywhere, even in Japan. They possessed impossible names, so difficult of pronunciation that we were filled with despair. Kingston's efforts to vanquish the difficulty provoked shouts of laughter from the entire party, including the two other ricksha men who were sitting in the doorway.

'Oh, I say!' he expostulated. 'Can't we rechristen them and call them something decent and English? —something descriptive, you know ; we ought to be able to find something if we put our heads together.'

'What have said in so muchee talk?' inquired Karakamoko politely.

'I'm going to give your sisters new names.'

'Oh! Ah! What will call them?'

'Gurgles and Giggles.'

'Engleesh name?' asked Tōmi with some anxiety.

'Very English,' we assured him.

'Ha! thank you.'

'Me too,' pleaded Karakamoko.

'You want an English name, too?'

'Muchee like.'

'Then you shall be called Caricature.'

'All same name,' she murmured in a dissatisfied tone.

'Not a bit of it—quite English.'

'What can mean?'

'Oh, it means something very clever and funny —make you laugh.'

Great satisfaction was now to be seen on every face. At this crisis tea appeared. Karakamoko and Tōmi brought it in, and soon we were all sitting in a circle, pledging each other out of the tiny cups.

A ray of afternoon sunlight filtered in through a crack in one of the movable walls, and lit up the bronze Buddha until his mysterious smile seemed meant for us and our innocent little jollity among the teacups, and not for the far-off event about which he was always thinking. A blue-bottle fly buzzed lazily through the room, knocking his foolish head against the walls and ceiling, as if he had fully expected them to get out of his way when they heard him coming.

It was difficult to make conversation general. Tōmi and his eldest daughter were the only members of the family who understood English, and

certainly neither Kingston nor I knew enough of their language to be intelligible. Still, in spite of the want of a common tongue, we were wonderfully sociable ; a little translation was thrown in here and there, which only made things more amusing.

Karakamoko presided at the teapot ; the office was no sinecure, as the tiny cups required constant refilling. Gurgles and Giggles handed about plates of many-coloured sweets, lightly sprinkled with pepper, and sponge-cake cut into fingers. Tōmi and the other ricksha men discussed a bowl of rice and an assortment of pickled morsels of fish which they picked up deftly with their chopsticks. Gordon and Madame Tōmi conversed in low tones with ceremonious bows and long, courteous pauses.

It was impossible to realize that it was all true, that it was really a fact that we were sitting there in that quaint little house with all these quaint little people. It was all so like a dream evolved out of some long-forgotten picture-book, lost in the memories of childhood.

Every good thing comes to an end. Madame Tōmi's green tea could not last for ever. Even the ricksha men felt this, and there came a time when boiled rice lost its charm, and even pickled fish failed to please. Yes, the time had come to go home.

'Tōmi, my boy,' said Kingston, 'call up the horses.'

Tōmi laughed, and, followed by the other coolies, left the room. Soon Gordon's carriage blocked the way. Our farewells were elaborate. There was a fine touch of 'local colour' about them. We made wonderful hoops of our indignant backbones, and as for Gurgles and Giggles, as Kingston afterwards remarked, 'they fairly swept the floor with their young bodies in their anxiety to do us honour.' At last even Japanese etiquette was satisfied, and away we drove into the gathering darkness followed by a lusty chorus of '*Sayonara !*'

CHAPTER VIII

AKASHI

'We really must visit Akashi,' said Gordon to me on the following morning. 'Baedeker says it repays a visit, and as we leave to-morrow for Ozaka, it seems foolish not to have "done" all the lions here first. What do you think?'

I put down my pen and leant back in my chair.

'What is to be seen when one gets there?' I inquired.

'An old Daimiō castle in ruins, I believe, and of course the inevitable temple.'

'All right, let's start at once; I can easily finish this afterwards. I'll look for Kingston if you will interview Tōmi and Co.'

Kingston was not to be found in any of the more respectable parts of the hotel; fortunately, I knew his proclivities. As I entered the bar the clinking of glasses, and a deep voice remarking 'Here's luck,' informed me that I was on the right track. Kingston had a capacity for 'standing drinks'; he would drink himself into your friendship before he had mastered your surname—your Christian name he

appeared to know by instinct. His tobacco-pouch, too, was common property; it only returned to its owner when it required refilling. His companion on this occasion rejoiced in the name of McPherson. He was a genial soul with a weakness for the mountain-dew, and a passion for treating life as inexpensively as possible. He had an eye for a bargain as well as a discriminating taste in whisky. His motto was, 'Always be up and doing, but never mind *who* you are "doing."' Kingston said I was too hard on Sandy McPherson—that, after all, it was not his fault: he had been born a Scotchman, and had never grown out of it.

'Wull ye no join us, Maister Watson; we're just tastin'?' exclaimed that worthy when he saw me approaching.

Resisting the temptation, I explained to Kingston the object of my visit. He at once agreed, and, in spite of the protestations of McPherson, accompanied me out-of-doors.

We found an exciting discussion in full swing. Tōmi and his friends were busily engaged in pouring cold water upon our plan. Gordon had nearly reached the extreme limit of his patience. A phlegmatic disposition is the first essential to success in an argument with an Oriental.

'Plenty too far; no can do,' repeated Tōmi at regular intervals.

The Spanish mule is a gentle and tractable

animal compared with Tōmi when his Japanese mind is once made up.

There he stood, smiling, apparently engaged in serene contemplation of the universe, to the outward eye the very essence of all that was sweet and obliging, but to the inward sense a bundle of long-eared prejudices which neither heaven nor hell could move.

We began to grow impatient.

'Surely you can manage it,' expostulated Gordon. 'The hotel proprietor says it is only a matter of thirteen miles.'

'Me thinkee twenty,' argued the arch-deceiver, pretending to calculate the distance on two of his stumpy fingers.

At this point Kingston's coolie was observed to whisper impressively in Tōmi's ear.

'What does he say?' I asked.

'He say will find three strong men can do.'

'Where?'

'You come see.'

On the outskirts of the town Tōmi introduced us to three coolies, who certainly deserved all the praise he had bestowed upon them.

With a parting cheer from our three deserters, we drove away in the direction of Akashi.

The weather was perfection. It was one of those delightful days which autumn lavishes on us in an endeavour to make us forget the bygone beauty of

summer. Now and then a wayside Buddha was passed—a strange presence, not without a certain benignity in the calm features so roughly chiselled in unpolished granite. In the little shrine dedicated to the god was a quaint collection of votive offerings —little gifts from many a humble traveller, naïve attempts at propitiation, visible hopes for success and a happy journey. Among them I saw a bunch of wild-flowers tied with a blue ribbon. The flowers were all faded, and drooped their heads sadly, and even the ribbon was bleached and stained by the raindrops and sunbeams. Was it a child's hand that had placed them there, perhaps in the simple belief that the graceful act would lighten the long journey and shorten the tiresome road to the weary little feet?

On and on we plodded. The road was fairly good, so that the even pace was kept up steadily mile after mile. Villagers were to be seen on either hand, working with rude implements at many kinds of farm work, their huge flat hats giving them the appearance of animated mushrooms. Several rickshas passed us going towards Kobé. Ladies were seated in them—wonderful Japanese ladies—whose immense rolls of hair, harpooned with silver pins, caught the eye before other details could be made out. We bowed to them as a matter of course; they returned our salutation gravely—almost automatically—without the slightest look of interest in

their eyes. It was difficult to tell what they thought of us, and it was still more difficult to realize that these ladies, whose features were schooled to a well-bred repose and complete absence of expression, could be the sisters of the bright nymphs of the tea-pot, whose light-hearted animation had charmed us so often over 'the cup that cheers.'

As we passed the last of these rickshas, a fan fluttered from it, caught, no doubt, by the fresh breeze blowing from the inland sea. It wavered for an instant, drooped gently downwards, then lay, a dash of warm colour, on the gray monotony of the road. In a moment I was out of my ricksha, and, fan in hand, was hastening after its retreating owner. Her coolie heard me coming, and waited till I reached them. Taking off my hat, I handed the fan to its owner. As she took it our eyes met. A look of pleasure, of gratitude, of interest, came into her face; the features glowed with expression; the lips curved into a smile. For an instant she hesitated; then, bending slightly forwards, she laid a little hand on mine. The action was simplicity itself, a deed of unpremeditated courtesy, prompted, doubtless, by Oriental politeness in its eagerness to conform to the supposed laws of Occidental etiquette. For a space we stood thus, and I felt that the veil which separated us was withdrawn; that the light of those dark eyes drowned all world-wide differences of race, of language, of country; that for a moment

she remembered only that she was a woman and I a man.

A voice interrupted us. One of her companions, impatient at the delay, called to her.

The hand was nervously withdrawn; the smile faded; the eyes lost their light, and, with a strange feeling of sadness, I saw that we had drifted far apart; that I was nothing to her; that the waves of immemorial custom, of unapproachable caste, of unalterable superstition, were rolling between us once again.

The quaintest sight of all was the children. I have spoken of them before, but I long to speak of them often, for I never grew tired of watching them. They were an endless source of amusement to us all. Their wonderful clothes; their miniature grown-up ways; their exaggerated politeness—as punctilious as a Spanish hidalgo or a Marquis of the Court of Louis XV.; and their general old-ivory air of grotesque comicality, would have an interest even for one who was no child-lover.

What could be more irresistible than to meet a little man of 'three foot nothing' in his straw sandals, with head shaven in ludicrous imitation of a medieval monk, all except a ridiculous halo of hair about the level of the ears? Your coming acts like a penny in the slot: while you watch—the oddity moves; the tiny yellow face expands into

"THE QUAINTEST SIGHT OF ALL WAS THE CHILDREN."

an Oriental smile; the Japanese eyes elongate till they almost disappear; the wee mouth opens and forms a 'Ha!' of wonder and satisfaction; then the oddity bows lower and lower, till the miniature hands reach the microscopic knees, in which position he remains till you have left him many yards behind.

Our coolies were in fine form. When they warmed to their work, they all undressed until they were covered only by the usual twisted cloth wound lightly round the loins. As they swung along at a steady trot, their magnificent muscles stood out, the yellow of their skins glistened, and the outlines of their figures flung dancing shadows on the dust-strewn road.

We reached Akashi at noon, and, leaving our rickshas at one of the tea-houses, proceeded to visit the temple. The old building stood on the top of a hill, about half a mile from the village. There was the usual fantastic construction at the bottom of the flight of granite steps which led up to it—two uprights supporting two massive cross-beams, under which the visitor walks. As this was painted a bright red, the effect was startling. It was very solitary there that afternoon—almost weird. The woods, dyed with autumnal tints, stretched away on either hand, and clustered up the slopes till they fringed the very walls of the old temple with a

leafy setting. Down in the sunny valley the cicadæ sang and the peasants worked, but up there scarcely a sound was heard except the wind as it stirred the foliage lightly. It was a large temple, much larger than the scanty population of the neighbouring valleys appeared to require. It seemed strange that the builders should have over-estimated the number of worshippers; but, as it was so old, it was doubtless built when its large, empty spaces were required. Perhaps Akashi used to be a town in the old days; perhaps the houses clustered up the hillsides ages ago, where now the forest underwood springs, and the birches stand out like streaks of silver against the leafy background.

Although Japan has a large population—in comparison to its size—yet here and there in the little Island Empire, the visitor comes across a temple buried in woodland—a great god forgotten by his worshippers—a ruin mouldering in desolation—an emblem of the Past lost in the unmindful Present. It is a curious thing to see old civilizations retiring and leaving a fragment of their creed behind them, like a broken doll unheeded by its childish owner. Nature has used these broken toys tenderly. I have no doubt that Nature felt responsible; she had helped to make them, although, like a wise mother, she knew that her children would wish to see what they were made of sooner or later,

and would tear them to pieces when they found out that the foundation was but sawdust; so she spun them a dainty garment of moss and clinging ivy, and strewing them with wild-flowers, and shading them with forest leaves, she took them back to herself.

This temple, however, was not yet quite deserted, for as we climbed up the long flight of granite steps we observed an old priest standing at the entrance. None of us were conscious of his arrival; he might have been there all the time, he was standing so still. His long yellow robe attracted the sunshine, and glowed out in contrast to the dark porch behind him. He was bareheaded, and the wind stirred his silvery hair and played with his long white beard. He looked like the incarnate soul of the solitary and deserted building. I do not think I have ever seen a more venerable face, or one which bore the stamp of goodness and simplicity to quite the same degree. His whole appearance bespoke the recluse, whose world lay in the realms of æsthetical imagination, in a quiet retirement within a spiritual atmosphere too pure and too remote for ordinary mortals. Buddha has such servants—men who look upon the body and its needs as their foes, and who live in a contemplative abstraction from all earthly matters. The old priest received us with gentle courtesy, and, after conversing for some time with Gordon, showed us over the venerable

building of which he had charge. Much of the purely ornamental had been removed, but there was still a wealth of embroidery and lacquer to show us what it must have been years ago. Mildew and rust had stolen in, however, and the tessellated pavements were stained with streaks of green. Tears came into the old man's eyes as he pointed out these marks of neglect; it appeared that few people visited the old temple, which was rapidly falling into ruin.

We said farewell to him sadly, with many ceremonious bows, and so left him where we had first seen him, standing alone with the dark building behind him. We looked back just before a turning in the woodland path hid the temple from us; he was still there, a solitary figure, with the glint of warm sunlight resting on his yellow robe. He looked so lonely that we felt sorry for him, and once more waved our farewells; then the sea of foliage surged between, and we never saw him again.

The size of the old Daimiō castle surprised us all. It must have been a place of great importance long ago in the old feudal days when the Daimiō was a veritable king to his army of serfs and retainers. The outer fortifications were extensive; guessing roughly, I should imagine they were half a mile in circumference. A deep moat, formerly filled with water and spanned by several draw-

bridges, encircled it with an outer ring. This has long since been filled up, and is now used as agricultural ground by the peasants.

Crossing through a gap in the wall, we stopped for a moment to wonder at the solidity of its masonry. Vast blocks of stone, often very irregular both in size and shape, had been fitted to each other with such wonderful accuracy that the join between them was hardly visible. The immense outer court-yard, through which we next passed, resembled a long-neglected garden more than a castle-yard. A tangled mass of weeds sprang luxuriantly from the crevices between the flagstones, enlivened here and there by wild-flowers and feathery grasses. Farther on we came to a second moat surrounding the inner fortifications and partly filled with water. From this a winding passage, flanked by a wall of battlements with watch-towers perched on bastions at regular intervals, led abruptly to the castle-keep. The latter rose to the height of fifty to sixty feet. In its centre was a large courtyard, while at each of the four corners a tall pagoda overlooked the entire castle.

'I think I'll sketch,' said Gordon, unfastening a little case which held a block, drawing materials, and a tiny box of water-colours. 'What are you fellows going to do?'

'Let's go and explore,' suggested Kingston to me; so away we went, leaving the artist at work.

We rambled in every direction. Not a sign of a living creature was to be seen. Once we startled a gray-hooded jackdaw in a ruined tower. He seemed so surprised that he forgot to fly for the moment; then he remembered his wings, and spread them with a hoarse croak of indignation. From out the cracks in the pavement tall pine-trees were growing. The wind had planted them long years ago, and as they grew they had pushed aside the hindering flagstones with the slow, resistless strength of their stems. Now they were great trees, many feet in circumference, and cast their shadow over a considerable part of the inner courtyard. They assisted us, perhaps more than anything else, to realize the age of the old castle. What sights these ruined walls must have seen! What tales they might tell! But old age has not made them garrulous; it has but steeped them in silence—silence more eloquent than words. There they stand—lonely, forgotten, dreaming of the past, brooding over dim memories of bygone centuries, unmindful of the desolation that has stolen upon them. Soft-cushioned moss and silver-gray lichen have woven them a many-tinted shroud, and dainty ferns cluster above them, draping their antiquity with many a fringe of gold and green. Nimble lizards, too, haunt their time-worn masonry, and play here and there in the warm noonday, little flames of emerald light. Perhaps they are not so much to be pitied, after all, these

ruined walls. They have had their day; and now that the busy world of men has swept by them, now that they lie stranded on the shores of Time, they can still dream of the Past, brooded over by an eternal repose, with the sunlight resting like a benediction on grass-grown court and weather-stained battlement.

When we rejoined Gordon, the short October afternoon was already drawing to a close. Clouds had surged slowly across the face of the sky, blotting out the blue and making it darker than it otherwise would have been at that hour. The shadows were creeping over the old ruin, the nooks and crannies were indistinguishable, and even the great courtyard was growing dim and indistinct where the line of battlements fronted the west. The tall pagoda-turrets, with their fantastic succession of bell-like roofs, loomed darkly against the evening sky. The bats flitted from their hiding-places and zigzagged noiselessly through the still air. It grew suddenly very cold. All at once the silent old castle seemed to us an eerie place.

Gordon had finished his sketch, so, packing up his drawing materials, we walked back to the village.

There was little conversation during that walk. Even Kingston seemed to feel the stilling influence of the hour. There are certain times when Nature deigns to show herself in phases which impress even the most matter-of-fact, those who are dead to her

subtler influences, and from whose material clay she has withheld that drop of kinship with herself which is the most prized possession of her favoured children.

The sunset was overpoweringly lurid. The masses of clouds added to the effect, rendering the little that could be seen doubly bright by comparison. When the sun had set, the after-glow was remarkable.

The horizon was a deep Prussian blue, almost black, no details being visible. Immediately above this came a long line, a mere streak of intense brightness—it dazzled our eyes to look at it; then the dark clouds shut it off, but it reappeared in a rift far above, softened to the faintest shade of roseate light.

As a boy I delighted in trying to analyze sunsets —now I am content to let sunsets analyze me.

It is wonderful what a sunset will find out, if you will only permit it to do so. How many thoughts, how many day-dreams, how many aspirations that you fancied lost, will it not find in the corners of your heart, and coax out and clothe in its tenderest colours and brightest smiles, till they live again, a little sunset life, before they sink behind the dark horizon!

As the light slowly left the sky we quickened our pace. It was cold and we were far from home. We saw that it would be a dark night, a night without stars, and we dreaded the long drive which lay

between us and Kobé. A mist lay in the hollow of the valley. The kaki-trees seemed carved out of ebony, the golden brown of their fruit lost in the shadow of the foliage. The little fields were all deserted now, and the loneliness and silence of the benighted valley made the October evening sad and cheerless.

We were all glad when, on reaching Akashi, we found our coolies awaiting our return A few minutes more and we were driving along the road, now lost in sea-mist, through the silent hamlets, echoing no more to the prattle of children's voices —a phantom procession in Indian file, each little carriage isolated from its companions in a tiny circle of lantern light; on, on, into the darkness, swaying lightly to and fro, to the wail of the wind, to the shiver of the foliage, to the sob of the waves whispering to the shore below.

CHAPTER IX

OZAKA

A STOUT figure clad in blue stood on the steps of the Hiōgo Hotel. It was Tōmi. This was a proud moment in his career. He was stationary. The ricksha—galling badge of office—was no longer immediately behind him, a running reminder of servitude. His attitude might almost be termed Napoleonic, and he surveyed his mercenaries with the resourceful eye of a great general. The dignity of superintending our departure, of being 'the observed of all observers,' of enjoying full liberty to order, counter-order, and, in fact, abuse, three other ricksha men, was myrrh and frankincense to Tōmi's ambitious soul. His watch was in his hand. That watch reminds me of an incident which occurred on the first occasion of my meeting with Tōmi, and which I have previously forgotten to mention. Preparatory to my engaging his services as a private ricksha man, he submitted to my notice two references. They consisted of a watch and a letter. With the exception of himself, they appeared to be the two objects that Tōmi loved most in this world.

He wore them both round his neck, concealed from the jealous eye of envy beneath his blue draperies, the one suspended from a chain of no ordinary dimensions, the other enclosed in a little bag of chamois leather. That the former had been a watch at one period of its existence does not admit of a doubt; its present incapacity of passing the time of day without coercion was, however, equally undeniable. Like the door of a very deaf old gentleman, it refused to respond to the expectant visitor without loud and continuous knocking. Its face resembled the countenance of the cynic, and was used but as a mask to conceal its thoughts. Tōmi said that 'me Lord Smeeth' had given it to him, as a reward for long and valuable services. We took his word for it, despite the fact that no record of the presentation was to be found on the watch itself; even the arms of the noble family of Smith were conspicuous only by their absence.

But it was on the second and epistolary proof of his true worth that Tōmi's hopes were centred. It was a letter of unsolicited recommendation. With its aid he felt certain of springing at once into the employment of any ever-to-be-honoured English sir whom he might select as his future master.

He drew it from out its little case—upon the occasion of our first meeting—with a touch of infinite tenderness. It was worn and thin. It had borne testimony so many times to Tōmi's virtues that it

was sick unto death of the whole matter. Opening it gingerly, Tōmi presented it to me with a smirk of satisfaction.

I read as follows :

'I, Thomas Jones, having for the space of two weeks suffered under Tōmi, the ricksha man, do consider it my duty to warn my fellow-men against him. He is the most lazy, dishonest, and untrustworthy ricksha man in Kobé.'

Then followed a little poem of a blasphemous nature, in which Tōmi was 'damned past all redemption,' and became an object of loathing and aversion to all right-minded men.

'Me karakter,' said Tōmi proudly.

I looked from Tōmi to the letter, and from the letter again to Tōmi. His ugly face beamed with joyous anticipation. Oh the pathos of it! Thomas Jones! Thomas Jones! was this worthy of an English gentleman? On the strength of that letter of recommendation I engaged Tōmi at once.

At the station a scene of the most affecting nature occurred. A great actor was lost to the world when Tōmi took to the shafts. 'You thinkee of me, I thinkee of you.' That was all he said, but the tone! the tears! the despair! My pen declines to desecrate the shrine of Tōmi's heart. Sacrilegious ink is too aware of the blackness of its intentions; nothing but

the purity of the unpolluted page can do justice to his emotion. The last glimpse of bright little Kobé was saddened for us by the melancholy associations connected with his red ricksha-duster, alias pocket-handkerchief, alias table-napkin, as he waved it after our retreating train.

Ozaka was our destination. The journey occupied the better part of two hours. The country over which we travelled was monotonous, and scarcely repays description. The scenes at the different stations at which we stopped were, however, full of interest. Our fellow-travellers proved an endless source of amusement. Railway travelling was a novelty in these bygone days, and brought out a wealth of eccentricity in the character of the little people, who presumably made use of it for the first time. Three different classes of travellers more especially attracted our attention, though I cannot but fancy that had we had time for a more exhaustive observation we should have discovered many other types equally worthy of mention.

First, there were the suspicious and overanxious travellers, who were of opinion that the guard, the porters, and even the engine, had entered into a conspiracy to defraud them of their promised journey. These good folk foregathered on the platform many hours in advance of the time advertised for the arrival of the train. They formed a little encampment, cooked their food, nursed their babies, and

attended to the more pressing needs of daily life. When the train was signalled, and still far distant, they were up and packed ready for the fray. Long before it came to a stop, and in spite of the resistance of the railway authorities, they boarded it with shrill cries of victory, and captured their seats in a tremor of self-satisfaction. Accidents should have been numerous by all the laws that govern Western travel, and one can only account for the absence of disaster by the theory that a powerful representative from the hierarchy of Japanese deities—a railway god of no mean lustre—has been detailed to protect the lives of inexperienced travellers.

Secondly, there were morbid and pessimistic individuals who had convinced themselves that they were about to die. Explosions, derailings, collisions, conflagrations, and all the list of possible ills that railway trains are heir to, haunted them like a nightmare. They were keenly alive to the desperate nature of such a hazardous undertaking. They took, however, a melancholy pleasure in the business. It gave them a dignity beyond their deserts. These poor souls had gathered their relations around them —aye, even, it would appear, unto that mythical individual the 'forty-second cousin'—and passed their last stationary moments in affecting farewells from the windows of third-class compartments.

Thirdly, there were the incredulous and frivolous-minded community, and this was a more numerous

class than either of the others. They treated the train as if it were a huge joke. Its least movement was food for laughter. They positively declined to recognise the official dignity of the little guard: they even went the length of 'poking fun' at him. The engine was all but a new toy to these joyous natures. They patted it approvingly, it was so nice and shiny. The pompous station-master, composed of gold braid and dignity, with a morsel, hardly worthy of mention, of human nature inside, found this class of travellers a thorn in his flesh. He attempted to explain to them the danger they ran through touching the engine, but though they were for the moment overcome by the reflection from so much solid gold braid, they did not believe him, and the moment his glittering back was turned, there they were again, more affectionate to the engine than ever!

On reaching Ozaka, we drove to Jiutei's Hotel. Jiutei himself came out to welcome us. We had to comply with the new and fashionable ceremony of shaking hands, for he had just got astride of the Western wave, and for the time was ultra-English.

'What a clammy hand he has!' whispered Gordon, secretly using his pocket-handkerchief.

'He looks sneaky,' said Kingston.

'Uriah Heep?' I suggested.

'Wishing for the honourable inspection of bed-

room?' questioned Jiutei, with a lavish use of the 'invisible soap.'

'Lead the way,' we answered.

'All right,' he said cheerfully, and, feeling this to be very English, he hugged his lean body with both arms.

We followed him upstairs. His hand left little damp impressions on the balustrade.

'Ah! most bee-utiful compartment!' he exclaimed in awestruck tones, throwing open the first door. 'Quite English,' he went on, pointing to the bed.

We felt relieved when, after having worked himself into ecstasies over every article of furniture in the three rooms, he stole noiselessly away.

'Well,' burst out Kingston, 'of all the oily——'

'You like some whiskee?' murmured a voice through a crack in the door.

'Good Lord!' ejaculated Kingston.

'You find him oful jollee!' went on the voice.

'We don't want whisky,' I called out.

'All right—never—mind;' and the voice gradually grew fainter as it receded down the staircase.

From the window of our bedrooms we overlooked the broad river Yodo. Baedeker says that the Yodo 'drains six provinces.' Kingston scoffed incredulously when I read this to him; but, then, Kingston is not cursed with a discriminating sense

of smell—Gordon and I believed it implicitly. The noble stream flowed immediately below us, the back of the hotel forming part of the wall of buildings which kept it within bounds. Its opposite bank, a long line of irregular houses, stretched away in a vanishing perspective as far as the eye could reach. The curious architectural eccentricities which I have dignified by the name of 'houses' made up as fantastic a medley of oddities as it is possible to imagine. Some of them were propped on stakes, which just saved them from a watery grave; others were perched upon the backs of useful relatives; here a young upstart smiled self-consciously, as if aware of his freshly-painted face; there a time-worn building drew its moss garment around it, its venerable walls and antiquated roof tottering to decay. The colouring of these humble homes was very beautiful. Sombre blacks mingled with rich vandyke browns; dull, mossy greens blended with deep shades of red; palest yellows harmonized softly with delicate shades of silver. The broad waterway recalled Venice, only here there was more life and movement, more of an aquatic existence than is to be found on the Venetian canals.

Ozaka, like Canton and many another water-city, has a large floating population which passes its entire life upon the water. The free gipsy life must be not without its charms for these nomadic children of the Yodo.

The movement and colour of the water fascinated us. Sometimes it glided along in black, velvety sinuosities, fawning at the feet of the dark houses, licking their dusty sides like some half-tamed wild beast. At others it sprang into life, roused from its lethargy by some obstacle which made it murmur hoarsely with the foam of sudden anger upon its lips. Out in the open, where the breeze could caress it, and where the sunlight lingered, it twinkled in million-eyed laughter—then it was lovely and lovable; but under the overhanging buildings, among the rotting piles, where the scum and filth of the city collected and the darkness reeked with decay, it flowed sullenly in sinister silence—then it was hideous and fearsome.

Many of the boats were anchored side by side We could see their flat-hatted owners doing little jobs on board, preparing meals, fishing, or bartering with their neighbours. Now and then a house-boat would float past, the four rowers who composed its crew chanting a weird refrain which came clearly to us over the surface of the water. The tiny sampans were as numerous as flies on a summer's evening, and sculled in and out between the bigger craft with wonderful skill, steered, as it appeared to us, with an almost involuntary movement of the long, dripping oar.

CHAPTER X

A CONVIVIAL GATHERING

A WONDERFUL odour of cooking pervaded the air. An objectionable smell, accountable only on the assumption that the cook had allowed the milk to boil over, was indulging in fried onions, and had thought it unnecessary to close the kitchen door. Our curiosity was aroused. Upon our questioning Jiutei, we found him in a condition of considerable excitement. 'I give deenner-party,' he answered. 'What you Engleehs call big feed—a tuck-in banquet: you understand?'

'Yes, we understand; but tell us, Jiutei, what is the occasion?'

Jiutei pursed his ugly face into a Japanese hieroglyphic. Occasion? 'Ha! quite right, on occasion, not every night! Oh no; to feed every night would be ruin.'

Much time and more patience was necessary before we elicited from Jiutei the information we desired. It then appeared that this was to be a dinner given in honour of a gentleman who had

'done somethings,' by fourteen of his admirers who had as yet 'done nothings.'

Great were the exertions of the entire household. Plates and knives, spoons and forks, were polished until they shone again. The drawing-room became a banqueting-hall of inviting appearance; and, as no festivity in Japan is considered perfect without flowers, a lavish supply of beautiful blossoms ornamented the table. Our visible interest in these unusual proceedings touched Jiutei's heart. 'To-night you look in see,' he advised us in a moment of confidence, and then he stole away to annoy one of the waiters. In a moment or two he returned with a smile of vindictive satisfaction. 'I say,' he chuckled, wiping his damp hands on his European trousers, 'it will be oful good deenner.'

'I am sure of it,' assented Kingston.

'Yes, gentlemen, you bet! dam good! Skuse me;' and away he crept again to the door, through a crack in which he eyed the waiters laying the dessert.

The 'company' were beginning to arrive. From a passage outside the drawing-room door we watched them as they came in by twos and threes. This dinner was to be European. It was to be visible on the very crest of the European wave which was inundating the Empire. Jiutei had set his heart on it. He was eminently successful—it 'out-heroded

Herod.' But it filled us with laughter that came near to tears. It was impossible to be otherwise than amused with this parody of a world we knew so well; and it was equally impossible to be otherwise than grieved that all the delightful characteristics of Japanese national life should have been discarded as though they were no longer worthy of affection. After all, it is but one with the metamorphosis that has changed the Court lady into the Parisian doll, the *Samurai* into the 'masher.'

The little men were dressed in the orthodox tail-coat and white tie; their shirt-fronts were resplendent, and their patent-leather boots might have been envied by a mirror. The preposterous solemnity of their demeanour was most marked, and we at once came to the conclusion that a dinner-party in Japan is as depressing a ceremony as a marriage in Scotland, although neither of them take place in church. Soup was a silent and painful ordeal; we watched its last moments of lingering consumption through the open door, and assisted in the decent disposal of its remains in the passage.

A little excitement was here introduced by an altercation between Jiutei and Nakamura, the head-waiter, which threatened to have serious consequences. All the waiters had been goaded to silent fury by the sharp point of their master's suspicions. He had the knack of discovering joints in their

armour, and touched them, so to speak, every time 'on the sore.' Flesh and blood could stand it no longer. Nakamura struck work; he was furious, and, I fully believe, had not Jiutei sought immediate safety behind Gordon's legs, he would have struck him also, and right well would he have deserved it. According to Gordon's translation, Nakamura shouted:

'Tell him I didn't eat the fish. Ha, blind devil! The fly seeks out disease, O spawn of a frog! I'm an honest man. He is as far from honesty as the tortoise is from the moon. Ha! ask him who watered the wine? Ask him what the soup is made of? Ha!'

It took all our diplomacy to soothe the injured Nakamura. The indiscreet questions he had suggested—more especially the one relating to the soup—roused Jiutei to a paroxysm of indignation which blood alone could assuage. The hungry cries of the fifteen helped us not a little, and soon the next course was tearing down the passage in hot impatience to be eaten.

I think it was while the fish was occupying their attention that we realized the possibility of the fact that we had made a mistake in our too hasty estimate of Japanese character; with the first circulation of champagne we were convinced of it. The Japanese *can* enjoy life, but in order to do so they must view it through a halo of Heidsieck, or let it

smile upon them through the sparkling eyes of Veuve Clicquot.

The gentle influences of sociability descended upon the party. Conversation buzzed around the room like a cheerful bee. As the dinner proceeded, it became more and more animated. If sociability appeared with the fish, hilarity burst upon them with the sweets. The champagne corks kept up a dropping fire, and the golden liquid loosened every tongue. Eyes sparkled at the merest apology for a joke; gestures sprang to illustrate the most trivial remark; and countenances laid aside their habitual absence of expression in honour of the occasion. When the dessert was well 'under way,' the convivial little men became aware of our presence in the passage. A short interview with Jiutei resulted in an invitation to join the party. We accepted with the greatest pleasure. A still capable majority rose to welcome us; an incapable but discreet minority refused to leave their seats. To our surprise, and greatly to our relief, many of our new acquaintances were able to understand English, and those who could not do so were perfectly conversant with French.

Our glasses were filled and emptied in a moment. The health of our Queen was proposed by the guest of the evening—the man who had 'done somethings.' Gordon responded to the toast. Our National Anthem was murdered amid uproarious

applause. Jiutei and Nakamura, whose reconciliation had been materially assisted by the remnants of a dozen bottles of champagne, led the cheering from the passage. The Mikado was in the next glass. His august memory ran near to sharing the fate of the luckless Clarence. A little diversion was caused by a retiring guest leaving his chair; no one suggested that he should be replaced, so he passed the remainder of the evening peacefully under the table. Kingston was considered an immense acquisition. His tremendous spirits swept the little fellows, metaphorically speaking, off their legs; all they could do was to sit and stare at him in open-mouthed wonder and admiration. His unblushing attempt at a song was received with frantic cheering; even his big cigars were accepted with an enthusiasm verging on tears.

The little man on my right took a great fancy to me; we swore eternal friendship. He wondered that we had never met before. 'It is extraordinaree,' said he—'quite too much extraordinaree.' He repeated this many times; indeed, it troubled him so much that even in the midst of discussing other subjects he would return to it with fresh wonder, and I would hear him murmuring, 'Quite too much extraordinaree,' half under his breath. He was no shirker of his nectar, this little man; in fact, he might have been an Irishman, his 'capacity' appeared to be so unlimited. Yet when at a later

period of the night's festivity he laid his hot little head on my shoulder, he preached me one of the most moving sermons on the beauty of temperance I have ever heard.

The tiny gentleman on my left was even more 'extraordinaree.' He was entirely engrossed with the construction of Chinese forts. Every object within reach was pressed into service. The exciting moment came when the fort was bombarded, or blown up, or otherwise razed to the tablecloth; then the cries of the attacking party and the crash of broken wine-glasses were most inspiriting. In the interval between the demolition of one fort and the construction of another, we conversed in French, and he was good enough to impart to me his views upon the subject of military tactics. 'See,' he would exclaim, 'how easy it is, this art of war. For example, we have here a million of pigtails, is it not? concealing themselves behind this fortification.' At this he would pile the remains of the wine-glasses into a palisade, flanked with oranges and bounded on all sides with bananas. 'What arrives?' continued my military enthusiast. 'Our guns, *pardieu!* They have no guns worthy of the name, cowards that they are! Now see that which happens! Boom! boom! boom! boom!' A hail of walnuts, a concentrated fire of sugar-plums, and the fort was a thing of the past. My friend was triumphant. He beamed upon me, the very essence of bland intoxi-

cation. 'You see,' said he, with an apologetic shrug of his shoulders, as one who demonstrates a self-evident fact—'you see. I told you. *Mais, mon Dieu, monsieur!* it is really too easy, too simple, is it not?'

The mirth and fun grew fast and furious. If my account of this famous dinner-party is found to be at all lacking in coherence, the unusual hilarity of the event must be my excuse. I do not precisely remember how many bosom friends I made, nor what I said to them; but if the number of times I drank to their health were any assistance to Nature, they will assuredly all live to enjoy a green old age. Kingston teaching the man 'who did' to polka was a closing feature in the night's festivity. Then about five out of a possible fifteen recalled their homes, and expressed a wish to see them once more; the majority said they preferred to be forwarded in the morning. The virtuous five were rewarded with choice of hats and overcoats. Jiutei was carried upstairs by the forgiving Nakamura, protesting loudly all the time that he heard someone stealing the corks. At last it was all over; the last of the five was laid in his ricksha, the last of the ten —it was my little Professor of Temperance—was laid on the billiard-table; the last handshake was given, the last embrace was avoided, and jovial and merry we assisted each other to bed.

CHAPTER XI

A PERSONALLY-CONDUCTED PARTY

THE next morning at a late hour I discovered Jiutei standing behind the pantry door. He had a red handkerchief bound round his head, which formed a bright contrast with the sallow yellows and greens of his unwholesome complexion. In popular language he was indulging in 'a hair of the dog that bit him.'

He smiled in a feeble, sickly manner when he saw me, wriggled uncomfortably, tried to hide a black bottle behind him, and said:

'Good-morning. Little water of soda very oful jolee drink.'

I inquired after our friends of the previous evening. He sniggered feebly.

'Fuss-class—all right. Gone home in rickshas at peeps of day. Much pains in heads, and much little waters of soda. Most 'musing.'

'Did they take it neat?' I asked, trying to catch a glimpse of the black bottle behind his back.

'Neat? Oh no—go home very dirty.'

'I mean they didn't mix, did they?'

'N—o,' he said dubiously, oiling his unshaven

chin with the palm of his disengaged hand. 'No; they drive home ten ricksha.'

Was Jiutei abnormally stupid, or was he only abnormally clever? I determined to find out.

'Isn't that rather heavy?' I asked sympathetically.

'Eh? How say?'

'Doesn't it make your left hand ache?'

'Left hand?' inquired Jiutei, examining his right hand as tenderly as if it were developing a new disease.

'I mean the bottle behind your back.'

He saw the game was lost, but the way he played the losing cards was magnificent.

'*Bottle!*' he repeated incredulously, slowly bringing it into sight. 'So it is—a black bottle! Most 'musing. Must have been cleaning him;' and he began to polish it gently with his coat-sleeve.

Breakfast was a saddening experience that morning. Dinner-parties did not suit the eggs, and we suspected the insulted soup of having taken refuge in our coffee-pot.

'We must do a little hunting round,' said Kingston, leaning back in his chair and filling his pipe.

'Where shall we go?' I asked. At that moment I felt a sensation of dampness behind me.

'We will go to the shops,' it breathed in my ear.

'We don't want a guide,' remarked Gordon.

'No guide! Friend! Gentleman by births.'

There was no refusing him. He changed the greasy tweeds for a suit of equally greasy black, of a clerical cut. From beneath his very low bowler his long, lank hair swung in stringy masses to his paper collar. An umbrella, an heirloom from a Japanese Mrs. Gamp, completed his outfit.

Off we started, in Indian file, Jiutei's ricksha leading the way. The morning was overcast; rain appeared to be not far distant. The crowded streets obliged us to drive slowly. Pools of water lay every here and there, the yellow mud splashing up from the ricksha wheels.

It was an artistic curiosity shop, full of the most tempting things.

Exquisite golden lacquer inlaid with ivory and mother-of-pearl; dainty biscuit china delicately painted with little Japanese scenes, fantastic, wonderful; bronzes innumerable, from a tiny crab to a seven-foot stork; fans, lovely and grotesque, cheap and costly; ivories telling of weeks of toil, of inimitable skill, of consummate art wedded to Oriental patience; trifles which made you hold your breath, and wonder at their exquisite beauty of form and colour; monstrosities which made you shudder at their hideous contortions, or turn away disgusted at their revolting indecencies.

Jiutei and the shopman exchanged the lowest of bows. They stood facing each other; their heads

nearly came into contact, when they both bent forward. I am told that it is not according to the rules of etiquette to uncoil from a bow before your *vis-à-vis*. It takes a wonderful amount of thought-reading to time your ascent to a nicety. The Japanese can do it, but we were not so successful. At times we were too soon, and were forced to begin again, and at times we were too late, which unpunctuality on our part nonplussed, and evidently annoyed, our acquaintances. Finally, after thinking out the situation, we changed our tactics, and bowed sideways; by so doing we could furtively watch our friend, and were ready to join him in his ascent to a nicety.

Kingston started on his usual devil-hunt. Gordon discovered a bit of genuine old Satsuma, and was handling it lovingly. Jiutei buttonholed me.

'You like ivory?' said he.

'Sometimes,' I answered cautiously.

'He got plenty—bee-utiful!'

'Tell him to show me something.'

Obedient to instructions, the shopman shuffled off, and soon came back with a bundle, which he carried reverently in both hands.

This was wrapped in a large piece of faded yellow silk. To see him undoing it, you might have thought he was a young mother handling her first-born. When the yellow silk was unwound, a roll of dirty brown cotton-wool appeared. This was tenderly opened, and the work of art held out at arm's

length, with an air which said: 'On your knees, O Western Philistine!'

'Ah!' sighed Jiutei rapturously.

It certainly was lovely. Picture to yourself an oblong box—possibly intended for ladies' gloves—carved in perfect imitation of a sack of corn. The sack had been attacked by rats—hungry ivory rats! Some were nibbling their way inside, tail and hind-quarters alone being visible; others were emerging with a mouthful of booty; some were fighting savagely for an extra fat grain; some were nibbling hastily, with an eye to fetching more as soon as possible; one was even scratching his ear frantically, as if he felt such conduct to be a sad waste of time. Rats, rats, rats! every tail aquiver, every whisker bristling with excitement, every little black eye open to its widest—a rat symphony in polished ivory, with the faint tinge of delicate yellow just perceptible on the finely-grained purity of the carven surface.

'How much?' I inquired, with studied indifference.

A short consultation followed, the shopman evidently agreeing to some proposal on the part of our friend.

'He say two hundred and fifty yen.'

'Ridiculous!'

'Oh, cheap!'—this in tones of wonder, with hands raised to heaven—'cheap as dirts; no can get so cheap in all Japan.'

'Hullo!' shouted Kingston's voice out of a mysterious winding in the labyrinth of curiosities.

'What is it?' I called back.

'Ask our friend Uriah what this jolly old devil costs—the one with the teeth and the cheerful complexion.'

'He say one hundred yen,' answered Jiutei.

'The devil!'

'Yes, nice cheap devil.'

'And how much is the little fiend next him—the one with the curly blue tail?'

'Thirty yen. Oh, muchee too cheap! most 'musing!' and Jiutei laughed noiselessly, an oily laugh which showed his red gums from ear to ear.

So it continued. The most expensive things were chosen for our inspection. The preposterous cheapness of everything amused him immensely. When we left the shop, he stayed behind for a moment, and we saw him exchanging some whispered remarks with his friend.

'More shop?' he exclaimed cheerfully, as he clambered into his ricksha.

'We won't trouble you any more to-day,' I remarked.

'No trouble; very glad take you plenty more shop.'

'Do you understand, Mr. Jiutei,' said I firmly, 'shopping with you is a luxury we can't afford. Good-bye; see you at lunch. Good-bye.'

As the six willing legs trotted off I looked back, and saw him scratching his black bowler meditatively, under the impression that it was his head, so overpowered was he with our unaccountable conduct.

CHAPTER XII

THE GEISHA'S VISIT

'Oh, cheap!' exclaimed Jiutei.

'And you can get them?' we asked.

'For you, dear friends, but for no other gentlemens.'

'Three *geisha*,' remarked Gordon.

'Yes, rather. Ha! bee-utiful! Will play—most 'musing; you will die of laughings. Will dance—never can see so nice in all Ozaka. Ho!'

Kingston's eyes twinkled.

'I say, Uriah, pretty ones, mind.'

'And young,' said I.

'And best frocks on,' added Gordon.

Jiutei executed a neat little French shrug; his sloping shoulders seemed to invite all responsibility.

'You bet!' and having said this he opened his mouth and laughed noiselessly.

'Well, that's arranged,' said Gordon. 'No, no more coffee, nor sugar and—oh, put the bread down and leave the cakes alone. We can help ourselves.'

Jiutei smiled forgivingly.

'To-night?' he suggested.

'Yes.'

'All right—we will have plenty fun. Good-bye. I say! do we want three or four *geisha?*'

'Three, and go away,' shouted Kingston.

'Yes, yes, of course three; yet—four would be cheap: not so cheap as three, but still cheap, dam cheap. Yes, yes, am going. Good-bye. Shall we have four? No, no, of course not—*three*—most 'musing!'

The walnuts and the wine had done their duty; the pleasant sensation of satisfaction born of a well-earned meal had stolen over us when Jiutei slipped into the room.

'*Geisha* ladies have come!' he remarked impressively.

'Show them in, you funny old man!' said Kingston.

Soon the sounds of padded footsteps and subdued voices were heard outside. They entered our room with low bows of much ceremony.

'Ah!' exclaimed Jiutei, utterly overcome. 'Ah! bee-utiful! bee-utiful! Cheap!'

We cleared a little space for them on the white matting, and, arranging the lamp-shade so that the light fell over this impromptu stage, sat beyond the shadow margin and watched the little trio with much curiosity.

They were worth watching, these little visitors of ours : such quaint fantasies in paint and powder, such comical creations in silk and satin, such whimsical artificiality in voice and gesture, could not be seen every day. We thought of the long hours before the silver looking-glasses necessary to compose these wonderful complexions, to arrange these fantastic coiffures, to drape these girlish figures ; of the difficulties overcome in the crowded *geisha* quarter ; of the cheerless night journey ; of the anxiety lest some bold, intruding raindrop should fleck the dainty dress or mar the painted face ; and so thinking, for once we agreed with Jiutei that they were cheap—yes, 'dam' cheap.'

'What are they doing now ?' whispered Kingston.

'Sh-h-h ! play has begun !' reproved Jiutei.

That comedy was incomprehensible, but infinitely amusing. There appeared to be three heroines, but a decided lack of heroes, and as for the inevitable marriage, it was not even thought of! The plot of the little story lay deep in a maze of dainty gesture, decipherable only to critics versed in the strange *geisha* atmosphere of faint suggestiveness. Words were few and far between, but words were not required to express the feelings of these Oriental oddities : the lifting of an eyebrow seemed freighted with mighty meaning, the voluptuous undulation of a rounded arm appeared to be an entire act in itself.

We felt our ignorance deeply. There seemed to be some humour lurking in the labyrinth of studied ceremony, for we heard Jiutei murmur 'Most 'musing!' at intervals; but it was never discovered by us. The fan language, however, delighted us all. To and fro they flitted, wielded by the flexible little hands—bright dashes of warm colour in the circle of mellow lamplight; here and there they trembled like painted butterflies, now resting for a moment to allow a smile to peep over their wings, then continuing their airy dance with many a poise and flutter, till the air was alive with little shivers and playful puffs born in the movement of their dainty flight.

The comedy came to an end in a wonderful bow, in which the whole company took part.

'Play finished,' announced Jiutei, with the air of a man who is saying something extremely original.

CHAPTER XIII

A WET DAY, AND A BILL

'WHAT o'clock do we leave for Kioto to-day?' I asked Gordon as we sat down to breakfast. He was usually our courier, and enjoyed the responsibility of looking up trains and paying hotel bills.

'Ten past five,' he answered, as he helped himself to a piece of toast.

'Something is wrong with this coffee,' groaned Kingston.

'It looks like tea!' I said sadly.

'And yet, curiously enough, it reminds me distantly of cocoa,' remarked Gordon.

'Call Uriah,' continued Kingston impatiently; 'we've to tell him that we're leaving to-day, so may as well slate him for this abomination at the same time.'

Soon the greasy tweeds were to be seen approaching, and a mildly cheerful voice was heard disclaiming all partnership with the unsettled weather.

'Do you call that coffee?' burst out Kingston, interrupting the little man in the serpentine coils of

a wonderful English sentence in which he had hopelessly lost his way.

Jiutei wriggled. 'Too strong?' he inquired innocently.

'No!' thundered Kingston: 'it's been drinking too much hot water—made it look quite pale, you see; if it's coffee at all, which I doubt. Ah! put it down; don't smell it like that. Oh, you needn't look so pious; you're quite up to these tricks.'

Jiutei raised his hands in a mute appeal to heaven; his expression reminded me of early Christian martyrs as depicted in antique woodcuts; he looked painfully out of drawing.

'We intend leaving this afternoon, so make out our bills separately,' said Gordon.

'Leaving *me!*'

'Leaving Ozaka; we had not thought about you.'

There was a dead silence. Had we at last managed to shake the dust of Jiutei from off our feet? Had we at last pierced the elephant hide of his sensibilities?

'Ha!' said he cheerfully, 'that will be oful jolee. I come with you. Sad to leave my hotel—lose much money. My good friends, never mind: we will go Kioto together; will show you plenty more shop.'

'Never!' we exclaimed as with one voice.

Jiutei looked at us for some time without speaking, then shook his head mournfully and turning away

with a deep sigh, disappeared in the direction of the kitchen.

Rain fell steadily, monotonously; the murmur of its downcoming was as the sound of the sea or the sighing of wind through forest branches. There is much to relieve the tedium of a wet day in Japan. The view from one's window invariably repays attention. Gordon and I watched the Ozaka streets together that morning; he amused himself with sketching several of the passers-by, whose quaint costumes lent themselves admirably to the medium of water-colour. The shops ranged on either side of the street seemed but ill-prepared for so persistent a downpour. One of them, well within our view, had a curtain suspended in front of its entrance, a scarlet background on which large white characters stood out with a trenchancy of contrast that was extremely striking. Chinese lanterns, alternate red and yellow, and of circular shape, decorated the street at regular intervals. At the least suspicion of a raindrop all the large paper umbrellas open as if by magic; the street seemed alive with them. As the majority were painted in the brightest of colours, they resembled a parterre of flowers expanding their petals to the welcome moisture. Oilskins, too, of a pale yellow shade issued out of doors to do honour to the Dragon of the Clouds. Many useful articles are fashioned out of this material: coats, hats,

umbrellas, awnings of shops, and hoods of rickshas. I cannot well see how they could better it, even from the artistic point of view; for although it is not as gay in colour as its neighbours, still, when once it is wet it catches the light and glitters out with all the brilliancy of a diamond. Little companies of children splashed past, each tiny item perched on the top of elevated sandals. A band of these youngsters makes a cheerful clatter—click-clack, click-clack—as they toddle over the rough paving-stones. No one appeared to object to the rain, and certainly no one was deterred by the inclemency of the weather from following his usual open-air occupations.

It was all like a picture, only it was real. We watched it in silence, and Gordon sketched rapidly. Here to-day and gone to-morrow! There is a touch of sadness in the thought, and although it is customary to deny to 'inanimate' Nature the supreme possession of a soul, yet for me it lives and feels. Of a certainty it imparts pleasure, so on that ground, at least, it is our benefactor, and I find it difficult to preserve an entire indifference when I bid it farewell. And so the long years will pass, and this little street will live its life, day in, day out, in sunshine and in rain, but we shall never again see it; for us it will never again be quite the same, never quite real, but only a miniature painting in the travel-book of memory.

The hour of reckoning was at hand. Nakamura presented our accounts. They were wonderfully and fearfully made up; they were fairly bristling with 'extras.' Kingston dashed off in search of the culprit, and came back dragging the guilty one behind him.

'What's this?' asked Gordon—'"Attend to gentlemens, troubles and times, 25 dollars"?'

Jiutei smirked and washed his hands spasmodically. 'Little extra,' he explained, smiling.

'Yes, I guessed that; but what's it for?'

'Ha! take you shop—p'raps you do forget?'

'But you said you came as our friend.'

'All right—you must pay for good friend.'

'Twenty-five dollars?'

'Oh, cheap!'

We all three looked at him.

Jiutei's imagination supplied the missing words most successfully.

'All right—all right!' he stammered hastily. 'Ha, ha! only little joke. Most 'musing. Ha, ha!'

It was still raining when we left for Kioto. The journey was dreary. Darkness had fallen before we reached our destination; it lay like a black pall over the city, through which nothing was to be distinguished save the twinkle of a distant lamp. The station was deserted and cheerless, the plat-

forms rendered slippery by the pervading damp. The breeze blew through the empty passages with a moaning sound. There is nothing so dismal as a railway-station on a wet, cheerless night.

The drive to the hotel was farther than we had anticipated. In spite of the cold which numbed me, and the rain which sprinkled me with a persistent drizzle, I enjoyed the experience—the sense of novelty was so strong. The loneliness of the benighted streets, the little lamp-lit spaces hemmed in on all sides by impenetrable shadows, the momentary glimpses into tiny homes, the long vistas of unknown thoroughfares, all charmed me, and kept my attention awake as the rickshas splashed their way over the uneven streets. Perhaps my strongest feeling was one of interest in the many human beings who must be all around me—there, in the darkness, unknown, unseen; whose lives had hitherto lain far apart from mine, but were destined to have at least one experience in common—a few days in the same sunlight and shadow, encircled by the same city, borne along by the same stream of strange Oriental humanity.

CHAPTER XIV

A GREAT SANCTUARY

TURNING a corner unexpectedly, we came in full sight of the temple of which we were in search. The suddenness of our approach made its size appear more than usually vast and imposing. There is something in the aspect of a great sanctuary which thrills us into silence: is it the proud flush of kinship with the mind which planned and the hands which reared the mighty edifice? Is it the pathetic disproportion between the physical and the psychical elements in man? between the puny body, heir to six feet of Mother Earth, and the lofty 'thoughts that wander through eternity'? or is it the human soul that permeates the chiselled stones, the voiceless prayer that soars heavenwards in slender spire and distant dome?

It was indeed a mighty temple. Its immense courtyard was covered with booths, stalls, restaurants, and tea-houses, all of the butterfly order, and surging among them, buying, selling, talking, and, of course, laughing, was such a holiday crowd as one rarely sees even in Japan. It was a great '*Matsuris*,' or

holy festival, and Kioto had turned out her thousands to do justice to the religious treat.

Many and gay were the colours, varied and quaint the costumes. Everyone was cheerful and good-humoured, elbowing the neighbours, pushing and gesticulating with vivacious merriment, determined to see and be seen; and every mind was made up as to the necessity of enjoying to the utmost the many-sided show in the fresh air and unlimited sunshine.

In one of the more humble of the booths sits a comical little man, a 'lightning artist' by profession. To him enters a *mousmé*. After the customary salutations, the girl whispers into the little artist's intelligent ear, which he bends forwards slightly for that purpose. What a smile! It must be a satisfactory order to summon up such a wealth of happy wrinkles. See how he seizes his two brushes, reflects a moment, then sketches with marvellous rapidity on the thick paper stretched upon his travelling easel! What is it? A map of Japan? A dream creation? Patience! A few more dashes, a dot or two, a smear of his thumb, and there—a racehorse at full gallop, with life in every limb, with strength in every muscle, with speed in every level mass of backward-streaming hair.

Under a flimsy canvas awning a fat old pedlar displays his goods—dolls, strings of beads, picture-books, shrines, tiny household gods, candles, and many other nondescript articles.

Sweetmeat stalls attract crowds of comical little ones; the babies fastened on their backs have the best view of the many-coloured dainties, for the eyes of the tiny nurses are barely on a level with the rough boards which pass for a counter.

Out-of-door Japanese life is seen to perfection at a great '*Matsuris*.' Here the women come to chat and gossip, compare babies, and talk 'clothes'; here the men smoke and drink *saké*, or saunter upwards to the great temple to repeat a prayer or two before going home; here the children love to play in the sunlit courtyard, in the little empty spaces found in odd corners, while the great crowd presses on and on in ceaseless streams round booth and stall.

A broad flight of copper-tipped steps led up to the main building. High above, a seven-storied pagoda looked down on the fantastic medley of black and red tiled roofs; its immense eaves, so characteristic of Japanese architecture, were fringed with bells which swayed lightly in the wind. Its roof terminated in a marvellous corkscrew turret called the '*Kiudo*,' or nine rings. At the top was a representation of the sacred pearl, often seen in Japanese art.

The roof of the main building, covered with massive black tiles, swept upwards in magnificent, scimitar-like curves, from the long eaves and overhanging gables. It impressed the stranger with its

solidity, as well as its grace of outline, for the depth and breadth of the carved beams appear to defy old Time himself.

A constant stream of people passed up and down these copper-tipped stairs. Now and then an entire family would ascend, the smaller children requiring a helpful hand, for the stairs were too steep for the tiny worshippers to climb without assistance.

On the lower steps rows of sandals and clogs were placed side by side. They belonged to visitors who had already entered.

Two hideous devils—one red, one green—glared at us from either side of the entrance: frightful objects, seen only in nightmares—or Japan. They wagged their horned heads in the most sinister manner, rolling their protruding eyes bereft of eyelids and grinding their pointed fangs. Their long arms were raised above their heads in speechless fury, while the claw-like fingers were outstretched to seize their prey. If I were a little Japanese boy or girl, I would be afraid to pass so close to these terrible demons. I am sure my comical little face would be transfixed with terror on 'bank-holidays,' and at night I would dread to be left alone with the memory of the two painted devils running riot in my little shaven head.

These gentlemen must be propitiated before the visitor enters; votive offerings must be given, or

"It was, indeed, a mighty Temple."

iron cash thrown into the collection-tray standing in front of each.

The crowd in the temple was nearly as great as in the sunny courtyard, so we were obliged to move slowly.

The air was close and heavy with the mixture of strange aromatic odours, which make an Oriental *pot-pourri* not altogether pleasant to English prejudices. The perfectly indescribable Japanese smell predominated: the odour of yellow-skinned races, of strange silks and warm Japanese bodies—curiously weird, immensely old and complex, exhaled by everybody and everything in this eccentric land, and which one never meets elsewhere. Then there was the religious scent of incense rising steadily from the many joss-sticks in honour of the gods, while floating in from the outer world came the pungent, overpowering stench of cuttlefish fried in oil.

The general effect at first was darkness, which the flicker of many candles seemed unable to dissipate; but when the eyes grew more accustomed to the 'dim religious light,' things which had appeared blurred and shadowy crept out of the surrounding gloom, and one outline after another dawned into prominence. The whole interior of the great temple was a succession of chiaroscuro effects, exquisitely modulated in shadow gradations, from the silvery gray of the main aisles to the form-

less gloom of the forgotten niches, lost behind some gigantic relic of barbaric ornamentation.

In strong contrast to this low-toned harmony was the broad flood of sunlight pouring through the wide-open doors—a golden stream with myriads of dancing motes powdering its level path. It fell on an immense mirror, which it dazzled with its intense brightness; then, recovering itself, flashed off in vivid reflection, away over the dark interior, above the many worshippers, and rested finally on the statue of Buddha, lighting it up with an almost startling effect. The great god towered above the sea of heads—a benign presence endowed with mysterious life in the broad, reflected sunshine. He seemed to be the goal of this river of light. His smile was more superhuman, more strangely remote, more wonderfully indifferent, than ever.

His weary waiting, with bronze eyes fixed on eternity, did not seem so hopeless now, for eternity sent its messages to him along that glittering path, and as he read them he smiled—his wonderful smile, so full of feelings which cannot find their way into words.

From the vaulted roof hung richly-embroidered banners, immense lanterns, and great chandeliers of gilded copper and encrusted bronze. Side by side they had looked down for ages upon a thousand festivals. The light smoke curling faintly up from the many incense-burners floated among them, en-

veloping them in a dim haze. Long years had helped to blacken and encrust the wrought metal and barbaric splendour of Oriental embroidery.

The old pillars supporting the roof were polished to the height of five feet from the ground by the constant friction of passing multitudes.

The uneven floor was worn into gentle modulations by the pressure of shoeless feet.

The burnished gold, the gleaming silver and brilliant lacquer which, centuries ago, must have dazzled the eyes and taken captive the senses with their wealth of colour, were now toned down to subdued variations of harmoniously-tinted shadow.

The whole building presented an appearance of dim antiquity, which carried the fancy back through long years to the remote past.

Gazing at the venerable interior, and then at the stream of human life flooding its aisles and courts, it was impossible not to feel saddened at the thought of the generations who had worshipped there, had lived and loved, feasted and fought, and then passed away into shadowland. Truly, 'we are such stuff as dreams are made of.'

We elbowed our way forward with difficulty. All three, being tall, overlooked the little 'Japs,' and turned them gently to one side when they got in the way.

We excited a great deal of attention, a good-natured curiosity for the most part. Occasionally

someone bowed to us in a stately manner, or a cluster of mousmés smiled, upon which we would bow back in the best imitation at our command.

The soft *frou-frou* of hundreds of stockinged feet shuffling over the uneven floor, the almost incessant clapping of hands, and the mumbling of subdued prayers, mingled with the merry sounds of laughter and applause from the great court outside, and the distant hum of city life beyond.

'Why are they clapping their hands?' asked Kingston.

'That is their way of attracting the god's attention,' explained Gordon. 'You see that old woman there making low bows before *Amiddah Nioraï:* watch her, and you will see how it is done.'

She was a very old woman, with skin like a faded piece of yellow parchment on which Time had written his signature in wrinkled hieroglyphics. Her bright eyes were strangely at variance with the pale, withered ghosts of long-lost youth and beauty. How difficult it is to realize that very old people have ever been young! Several times she bowed low, then clapped her hands in a quick, impatient manner; then she bowed again—lower this time, for *Amiddah* was awake now, and was watching her with a ferocious snarl which must be propitiated; finally, throwing a few iron cash into his votive box, she hobbled slowly off, mumbling to herself the while.

We came in front of the gilded bars which isolated that part of the temple set aside for the god and his attendant *Bonzes* (priests).

The lower portion of the god was covered with little objects which appeared to me to resemble wisps of paper.

'What are these?' I asked, pointing to them.

'Successful prayers,' answered Gordon.

'Prayers!' I repeated incredulously.

'Yes, prayers; there—that man is throwing one now: see! he has missed; how unhappy he looks! The idea is to write a prayer on a piece of paper, chew it till it is reduced to pulp, roll it between the palms, then throw it at the god: if it sticks it will be answered; if not—the supplicant goes away disappointed.'

'The *Bonzes* are going to sing,' continued Gordon. 'We are fortunate; it is only on very great occasions one can hear them chanting.'

The costumes of the *Bonzes*, who were dressed in their ceremonial robes, were very imposing. The long vestures were made of silk: one pale rose-colour, with a surplice of light blue; another delicate violet, with a surplice of deep orange; others in many different shades, contrasting by their gay butterfly tints with the time-toned colours of the sanctuary background.

They formed a bright and imposing group seated in a sort of mystic circle round a monster drum.

One of the *Bonzes* slowly raised his arm. We could see that he held a fantastic drumstick in his hand. A solemn hush fell over the expectant multitude ; the sea of upturned faces gleamed white along the temple aisles. A moment of silent suspense, then the blow fell, and before its vibration had died away the chanting began. What weird singing it was! So unnatural, melancholy, and mysterious that Dante might have taken them for a party of the damned sorrowing for friends and pleasures lost in the far-off upper world. The voices rose in unison in a tremulous minor key, like the moaning of an Æolian harp, or the wind wailing through a deserted house on a winter's night. An imperceptible sigh at first whispered out, wavering and dying away, then swelling into a steady volume of rhythmic sound—constant reiterations of one subdued, melancholy note suggestive of sadness, of infinite longing never to be satisfied, of hopeless despair borne on the wings of sinister sound. Then came a *rallentando* and *diminuendo*, long drawn out, prolonging itself in a wail of unspeakable sadness, growing softer and softer till it was but a breath whispering away into silence. As the last notes trembled in the air, the heads of the singers bowed lower and lower, till, just as the dying pulsations of the melody faded away, 'Boom!' came a dull, muffled blow from the big drum. Then the heads were raised, and the music recommenced, only

to finish again, later on, in the same unexpected manner.

It was the most characteristic sacred music that I have ever heard, and it affected the imagination strongly. A scene to remember: The great dusky temple imperfectly lighted by clusters of candles; the mysterious shadows lurking in the gloomy corners; the figures of the old gods seated on their temple thrones; the silent crowd of worshippers; and, penetrating all, enveloping all in a weird sound-atmosphere, the sombre psalmody of the *Bonzes*.

There is something vaguely terrifying, something incomprehensibly solemn, in Oriental forms of worship.

It seemed to me that I was listening to the religious heart of Japan, pulsating in musical beats, throbbing in an unknown arrangement of mysterious rhythm, stirring strange echoes and distant reverberations in the listening soul.

The music died away, and the crowd began to recede from the railings.

'Have you seen *Binzuru?*' asked Gordon at length.

'Who is *Binzuru?*' I questioned.

'*Binzuru* is a deity now. He used to be one of Buddha's sixteen disciples. He cures diseases.'

'Shall we go and see him?' I suggested.

'Yes,' he assented. 'Take care of that tiny *mousko*. "*Okini arigato, okami san*" (Many thanks,

madame),' he said to the little fellow's anxious mother, who caught him up out of the way of the big foreigners.

Binzuru was a little uglier than the other gods. It required all his reputation to induce us to like him. Like some of his profession, he looked capable of making a little work for himself; but as he knew that he could cure any fit of terror which his face might occasion, his ugliness was excusable from his point of view. Two immense incense-burners were placed before him; the dull glow of the lighted charcoal could be seen against the dark background.

'How does he work his cures?' I asked.

'Personal contact,' answered Gordon: 'you rub the place that you wish healed with the same hand with which you have rubbed him. If you wait a minute you are sure to see someone do it.'

We waited patiently for several minutes, but no one came. *Binzuru* was not in much request that afternoon. The crowd surged past him, but no one stopped. A great many people bowed to him with the air of old acquaintances, and one poor woman laid a little bunch of flowers between his huge feet—a little act of gratitude for the sickness that he had helped her to shake off, and which had left her still pale and thin.

A shrill, childish cry made us turn to see what had caused it. A little girl had fallen and hurt herself.

The pavement was hard, and the little knee had bruised itself against a corner of one of the uneven flagstones. Tears welled up in her eyes and trickled down her cheeks as she held up the injured knee for an old woman's inspection. The rose-leaf skin was slightly broken; the cruel pavement had scratched it. The old lady bent over the little sufferer and whispered a consolation, for the look of pain left her face, and an expression of confidence took its place. Hand-in-hand they crossed over to *Binzuru*. We looked on, interested to see what they would do. The old woman clapped her hands, bowed, muttered a prayer, stroked the god's knee with her withered hand, then rubbed the little human knee tenderly. The cure was effected at once. The little child smiled up at the ugly deity gratefully, with a naïve affection in her eyes. His impassive, stony stare seemed beautiful to her; his repulsive face had kindness lurking behind it. The contact with the polished metal was an act of infinite tenderness in her eyes: dear old *Binzuru* had kissed her knee and made it well, so of course she loved him and would think of him often, sitting there in the dimness of his temple home, waiting to heal little children who had hurt themselves.

Leaving the temple, we came again into the open air. Standing on the top of the great flight of

steps, we overlooked the sunny courtyard and temple gardens beyond.

Flocks of pigeons wheeled through the still air over the heads of the people. These birds are fed by the devout with sacred peas and beans, sold for the purpose at one of the stalls. No one is allowed to kill them, so they live a life of safety and happiness around the precincts of the old temple. It was a pretty sight to watch them. Many were perched on the sombre gables, preening their soft plumage in the genial warmth, or cooing to each other in all the tender inflections of pigeon love. Others flocked round little children, eager to be fed from the tiny hands grasping the bags of grain. With many a restless flit and flutter, with many a coquettish bow, with many a twinkling run of the little pink feet, they would come nearer and nearer, till, suddenly startled by something beyond the ken of pigeon understanding, they would sweep aloft like a soft gust of snowflakes eddying through rainbow light, the opaline hues and tender tints of their plumage catching the sunshine and dancing a wonderful colour-dance to the music of beating wings.

I am afraid it would tire the reader were I to tell of all the curious and interesting things seen by us in the sacred fair on that sunny afternoon : of the two holy albino ponies, fed by Kingston with tarts until their keepers indignantly interfered to save the

steeds from a pastry death ; of the miraculous fountain, said to bring children to childless wives ; of the merry games and roundabouts to which we treated as many little *mouskos* and *mousmés* as could be persuaded to join us ; and of the tea-houses, in one of which we spent the last pleasant hours of daylight reclining on the soft white matting and listening to the strains of *samisen* music.

That evening, at dinner (we happened to be dining alone), Kingston rose from his chair and said :

'Gentlemen, I have a toast to propose.'

'Hear, hear!' exclaimed Gordon.

'Get it out, old man,' said I.

'I wish,' continued Kingston, bowing gracefully in acknowledgment of our encouragement, 'to ask you to drink to a new friend, a big boss in his way. His one regret is that he cannot be here to-night to meet us, but I may safely say that if he knew the quality of this champagne his sorrow would be turned to laughter and his regret would give place to thankfulness.' (Cheers and loud cries of 'Name! name!') 'Don't hurry me, gentlemen. Give the horse his head. I may be unworthy to name him, not having the gift of the gab like my honourable friend on my right, but I can drink as much' (cries of 'More! more!')—'I said *as much* —as you two fellows put together; so I guess

I've a sort of right to do the honours. His name is Buddha!'

Great applause. Three glasses, brimming with champagne, were clinked together.

'Buddha!'

'Buddha!'

'Buddha!'

'May he smile for ever,' said I.

'May he sleep cradled in song,' cried Gordon.

'May he never want a spit-ball,' shouted Kingston.

CHAPTER XV

A COMEDY

WHAT a crowd there was! I think we must have chosen some holiday evening for our visit to the Kioto theatres, some annual festival when all these mirth-loving little people were packed in a gay laughing mass, swaying hither and thither under the streams of yellow gaslight. On we wandered, elbowing our way with difficulty, pausing now and then to inquire the price of some fantastic oddity, or to laugh with the merry crowd at some contortionist advertising with comic gestures the wonders of the show within.

Booths and stalls, archery galleries and dancing saloons, merry-go-rounds and theatres of every sort, lined the street. The noise was deafening. A babel of many sounds, a fantastic mixture of music and discord, rose around us. Human voices tuned to every key blended with the barking of dogs and the ceaseless whir of machinery.

It was all so diminutive; but that is the dominant colour, so to speak, in a Japanese landscape. The little showmen, each stationed on his own little

platform in front of his own little show, amused us immensely. Their anxiety to secure our patronage was so real and childlike; their joy when they succeeded in attracting our attention was so unprofessional and naïve; their gestures, cries, costumes, so irresistibly comic—yet so full were they of bland urbanities withal, so steeped, as it were, in Japanese courtesy—that their solicitations never wearied us.

Our guide was the feature of the evening. We had been much averse to engaging his services, but his interest in our private affairs and his anxiety to come with us in any capacity at length prevailed over our objections. For two days he had treated us with that expectant attention which a rich uncle usually experiences from a school-boy nephew on the approach of Christmas. Did we bargain for some curiosity, an insinuating voice at our elbow would suggest an even farther diminution in the price. Were we desirous of starting for a ricksha drive, a little drove of rickshas would at once make its appearance shepherded by our zealous friend. He forestalled every wish; he existed but to do us a service. He relied implicitly upon our generosity. When we engaged him his delight knew no bounds. Slapping his legs in his enthusiasm, he rushed out of the room, presumably to impart to his friends the news of his good fortune. Money appeared to be a secondary object in his consideration. Not that he

despised it, but to his mind it lagged a long way behind pleasure.

At the fair he was in his element, and fully determined to have what school-boys call 'no end of a good time.' He insisted upon seeing everything; he kept the public purse. Not a neglected booth nor deserted show but he patronized it royally, paying with no niggard hand for four of the most expensive seats. The charms of the fat lady moved him to enthusiasm; her very superfluity of flesh rejoiced his soul. The games of skill aroused the gambling element within him, and it was with difficulty that we tore him away from the cocoa-nuts. We humoured him to the top of his bent. It more than repaid us to see his appreciation of all those good things. The knowledge that we were paying him handsomely to enjoy himself added not a little to the humour of the situation. In his purely official capacity he was so entirely useless that we doubted whether anyone had ever before taken him to this quarter of the city, so genuinely surprised was he at the many interesting things we were able to show him. His unattractive face fairly beamed with simple happiness, and when something more than usually amusing tickled his fancy, he doubled up in paroxysms of boyish laughter. From side to side of the crowded street he darted, dragging us after him; it was as much as we could do to keep pace with his young enthusiasm. Now

and then he met other guides—not such originals as he, but jolly fellows, too—whereupon he would stop them to inquire the way, and ask their opinion as to whether there was anything worth seeing round the corner.

At this point our little guide called a halt. We were in the most crowded part of the thoroughfare, and hopelessly blocked the traffic, but that did not appear to trouble him.

'What does he say?' I asked Gordon.

'He says that this is a theatre, and he wants us to take him inside.'

'Won't we lose most of the play by going in so late? It must be nearly ten o'clock.'

'Oh no; he tells me it began ten weeks ago.'

'What?'

'It is a six months' play.'

'By Jove! The same actors and actresses?'

'No; they take it in relays. But come on. We'll lose him if we talk any more; he's always running off.'

We followed our guide through a tiny door, past the pushing crowd, and then climbed to a little gallery which ran round three sides of the building. A semi-twilight reigned; in the obscurity we could see rows upon rows of yellow faces. Were these Japanese? Where were the smiles, the merry laughter, the rollicking good-humour? I turned to

the stage, and in a moment I understood. Who is it that accuses Englishmen of taking their pleasures sadly? He has never seen a Japanese play-goer. He has never heard a Japanese Comedy. I have seen many sad things in my life, but never one quite so superlatively sad as that performance. Seated on the matting of the balcony, shoulder to shoulder with dumb, patient rows of dimly-seen human beings, we listened to ten minutes of concentrated melancholy. The atmosphere was indescribable. In spite of their national character for cleanliness, there can be no denying that when they congregate in numbers they possess a peculiar and pungent atmosphere of their own.

On this memorable occasion the performers were all women, some of them, however, being dressed to personate men. They were seated in a row on the badly-lighted stage, with their legs doubled beneath them, and in this extremely awkward position they carried on a lugubrious sing-song dialogue to the accompaniment of a shrill flute and a monotonous drum.

Occasionally some more than usually painful effort on the part of the performers elicited loud groans of applause from different parts of the house.

Nothing more doleful or more tedious could be imagined. There appeared to be an entire absence of anything approaching interest, and yet the audience sat there, spellbound as it seemed, wrapped

up body and soul in the imaginary sorrows enacted before them. For our part, a few refreshing murders would have cleared the moral atmosphere; we would have hailed the last scene in 'Hamlet' with positive delight.

An unexpected noise beside me attracted my attention. It emanated from our guide, whose presence for the moment I had forgotten. I peered into his face. Ye gods, what a change! He looked aged by half a century; the joyous carelessness of childhood had given place to the careworn grayness of maturer years. It was with difficulty I recognised him, so completely had he altered. His face resembled a mask seen in some Japanese curiosity shop, the features contorted beyond belief. Japanese art is not all imaginative; its grotesque side has its counterpart in one phase of real life. He was unconscious of my scrutiny. One felt that it was but the body of him sitting there, like an untenanted house; that the vital spark, the sentient soul, had fled to the stage—that it lived, breathed, and felt, but in that strange atmosphere of discordant artificiality. And yet the link between the body and soul was not entirely severed, he was in no state of trance, the abstraction of mind from matter was only partial; for, as I watched the spasmodic clenching of the hands, the wild rolling of the eyeballs spoke of mental emotion of no ordinary character.

What story could it have been, to move so strongly such light-hearted children of Nature? I doubt that, even had we understood the words, we could have penetrated to the soul which they shadowed forth. It was the old, old problem—East *versus* West. What hope that our minds could clasp hands over even so apparently simple a subject as dramatic Comedy? Situations which appealed to us as irresistibly comic amused them not at all, and interminable dialogues, droned with nasal inflection, which wearied us beyond belief, moved them to the verge of tears.

Ten minutes of Japanese Comedy would suffice the most enthusiastic playgoer for the term of his natural life. We all longed for someone to rebel. The fear of spoiling the enjoyment of others prevented Gordon and me from speaking. At last, to our intense relief, Kingston took the initiative.

'I say,' he whispered, 'let's get out of this; I can't stand it any longer. Whew! did you smell that? It's worse than a whale factory in Iceland. Get up, Gordon, and just make this Johnnie understand that we are going home.'

The moment our little guide realized our intentions, I saw that my sympathy with his apparent sufferings had been misplaced. He was indignant. We had no right, he said, to have brought him out if we had intended to take him home so soon. He might not have another opportunity of hearing this

Comedy. When he saw that nothing would induce us to stay, he submitted, but with a bad grace, and our return to the hotel, through the slight rain which had begun to fall, was the reverse of cheerful. We were silenced by the depressing influence of the play we had witnessed and the necessity of avoiding the puddles which lay in our path. Our guide, however, aired his grievances loudly, and took a petulant pleasure in wetting his feet.

We had disappointed him. He could not have believed it of us. Where was our taste? It was a beautiful Comedy; never had he been so happy. Why, oh why, had we taken him away?

From his remarks, we inferred that he had counted on seeing the end of it, and had hoped to enjoy at least a fortnight's 'ecstasy of woe.'

CHAPTER XVI

THE RAPIDS OF KATSURA-GAWA

'WHAT a quaint old coffin!' said Kingston.

'Do you think it's safe?' I asked a little anxiously.

'It's large enough, at all events,' remarked Gordon.

We were standing on a rocky bank overlooking a broad river. The subject of our discussion, an old barge, was moored to a little landing-stage immediately below us. A group of boatmen were waiting for us to decide whether or no we would attempt to shoot the rapids of Katsura-Gawa in their antiquated property.

'We can but die once,' said Kingston cheerfully.

'All right,' cried Gordon. 'Come on, let's start.'

In a few minutes we were afloat.

No sooner had we started than our crew proceeded to undress. As each one had only a blouse, a linen cloth, a hat, and a pair of sandals, this was soon accomplished. They had very ornamental skins, which were an excellent substitute for clothing. Carlyle has said in 'Sartor Resartus' that in clothes lies all individuality, and that were

you to take away the outer husks, the 'cloth-webs and cob-webs,' the Imperial mantles and the rustic smocks, you would reduce poor humanity to a dead-level of unadorned nakedness. It is clear that Carlyle never saw these ornamental skins. Instead of taking away the *cachet* of individuality, they gave it. How is it possible to confuse, overlook, or forget a man whose very body is an interesting study in Japanese fiction, whose cheerful reds and uncompromising blues greet you half a mile off, perhaps even farther if it be a sunny day? You may ignore plain Mr. Smith dressed in tweeds, but I defy you to ignore Kusanojiro Sama tattooed to personify a rainbow. They formed a very brilliant boat's crew. Dressed they would have been only coolies; undressed they were living pictures. One forgot their nakedness in their decoration. I wondered how these apparently poor men could have afforded such wealth of artistic ornamentation; tattooing is an expensive luxury in Japan. Perhaps some impecunious artist, stranded in their native village, having lost his canvases, had been reduced to fall back on these human substitutes. To travel with them was quite a 'liberal education.' Were you mathematically inclined, you could pass the time in solving the pretty blue and red problems worked on one instructive body; were you a believer in eternal punishment, you could moralize pleasantly in contemplating the plump proportions of another little

"THEY HAD VERY ORNAMENTAL SKINS."

human study in the grip of a frightful fiend, the claws of the devil seemingly buried in the bleeding flesh; and were you fond of ladies' society, you had only to sit behind, or even in front of, the ugly captain, for he was so wrapped up in a fascinating female that for the life of me I could not tell where the lady ended and the gallant captain began.

We were in mid-stream, gliding along, borne by the steady current. The scenery was bold and impressive. On either side the hills rose precipitously, a dark, rocky barrier which completely shut us in from the outer world. No vegetation clustered up their barren sides or nestled into their stony glens. The frowning crags, unsoftened by any intervening veil of foliage, loomed naked on the sky-line. The sun shone down at intervals. Ragged masses of gray cloud were drifting slowly overhead. No other boat was visible; no sign of life gave a human interest to the scene—nothing but the dark mass of water flowing silently between the lonely heights, and above all the gray dome flecked with more distant blue. Once a bird of prey sailed slowly up to us on outstretched wings, wheeled round us, then, uttering a hoarse cry, disappeared behind a wall of rock.

Our crew joined the ricksha men in the stern. Squatting on their heels, they smoked their little pipes and carried on a desultory conversation in undertones.

It was a strange sensation to feel one's self thus borne along without a sound; to see cliff and hill, rocky bank and frowning height, gliding past one in silence, like the creations of a dream.

We watched bend after bend appear far ahead, approach, pass us, then recede into the distance. We were too engrossed with the ever-moving panorama to converse.

The captain spoke to Gordon.

'What is it?' we asked.

'The rapids,' and Gordon, pointed to a turning in the river a quarter of a mile off.

We stood up to look.

A sudden shaft of sunlight fell on the point towards which our gaze was directed. It streamed from between two clouds. The edges of these clouds were built up in billowy formations, a dazzling white melting imperceptibly into deeper and yet deeper shades of neutral tint. In the distance, between the cliffs, something strange was to be seen, something which danced and glittered, leaped and flashed in the sunlight.

Soon our pace changed. Nothing could have been more placid, more easy-going, than the movement which had hitherto dominated us. Now, however, a wayward mood seemed to permeate this mass of water, and in petulant coquetry it toyed with its plaything before it tossed it into the foam and turmoil of the rapids. It beguiled it to the shadows

under the beetling rocks, where it caressed its timber sides with the murmur of a liquid embrace. Then, without a reason, it swept it away swiftly, heedlessly, on, on, to where Danger tossed her white arms to the sky in a whirl of sunlit welcome.

The river seemed conscious of the danger towards which it was hastening. It grew troubled; the swirls became larger and larger, the undulations more and more frequent, till, as we swept onwards, the first rock rose from the surface and the seven devils of its temper broke loose.

It flung itself against its tormentors with cries of inarticulate rage. It roared aloud in its fury. The livid backwash seethed up. The maddened waters boiled and fumed and flashed. Columns of spray shot high into the air; then, falling back, were whirled onwards with the current. It was a wild scene, but singularly beautiful. Our boat paused a moment near the shadow margin, as if terrified at the seething hell of waters; then, obeying an irresistible impulse, it sprang into rainbow light. We held tightly to the cross-bars which took the place of seats.

The captain, standing in the stern, rudder in hand, shouted his orders to the crew. His voice was drowned in the thunder of the waters. The men, however, knew their duty. Taking up the bamboo poles, they made their way with difficulty to the bows. Several rocks were shaved as we swept past. A shower of yellow foam fell on us. One touch

from a jagged boulder, and we should have gone under. Suddenly a larger one than usual appeared ahead. It lay right in our way. Round it the torrent seethed and roared; now and then a dripping ridge of rock showed through a setting of spume; towards this we shot like an arrow from the bow.

I glanced at my companions. Gordon was smoking. Kingston's mouth was open; his eyes were sparkling with excitement. In their different ways they were enjoying it immensely.

On we flew, a mere plaything in the hands of the river. Closer and closer came the boulder, till, just as we were being hurled upon it, three bamboo poles flashed out, a violent jerk was felt, followed by a tremble in every plank; then, deluged in spray, but safe and sound, we sped on amid the deafening uproar which rose around us.

Kingston gave a yell of excitement.

'Isn't it glorious?' he shouted in my ear. 'Look, here comes another! Hold on! Bravo! Off we go again!'

The old barge began to dance a polka. It entirely forgot its age, and behaved in the most skittish manner. It groaned and it creaked, it plunged and it laboured, it flew to one side, then to another, it sprang forward, stopped, darted on again, while every plank streamed with foam as the long, dripping poles flashed out and the three muscular bodies did battle with the rocks.

The coolness and skill of these men were wonderful. They seemed to know every rock personally. While awaiting an obstacle they would stand motionless, keeping their balance in some marvellous way that came only of long and constant practice, the fine lines of their figures defined against the rushing water and dark cliffs. Then, when we were on the point of being hurled upon a rock, they would poise themselves, raise simultaneously a wild howl, place the slender poles with a swift, steady thrust, and strain till every muscle stood out and the bamboos bent like steel under the force of the sinewy arms. The strange tattooing glinted from off the wet surface, the reds in particular catching the sunlight as the drip of the spray showers trickled down the naked skins.

How the scenes witnessed during the day return to haunt us when the eyelids are closed in the semi-unconscious interval between real life and dream life!

How the transitory impressions which have ebbed and flowed around us like a warm, sentient sea steal upon us at nightfall, and bear us away on their memory-laden waves to the mysterious land of sleep! The weary brain yields itself up without an effort to these gentle visitants. Their effect is soothing, dreamy, somnolent.

There is something in the ripple of running water

Europe behind us, and to approach closer to the primitive and picturesque people of Japan.

The advisability or non-advisability of taking a guide was a matter which gave rise to considerable discussion. Gordon being conversant with the language of the country was one argument in favour of an unconducted party ; the fear of falling into the hands of a second Jiutei was also strong upon us, and I think we had nearly decided against a guide, when a chance question propounded by a man whose acquaintance we had made at Ozaka turned the scale in the opposite direction.

'Why not take a girl?' said he.

'A girl?' we repeated rather incredulously. Had he suggested a balloon we could not have been more genuinely surprised.

'Yes; it is often done. Girls make capital guides, and are much more amenable than men.'

The novelty of the idea appealed to us. We each of us had passed a considerable part of our youth in guiding girls, so that the notion of three male animals with highly-developed bumps of locality trusting themselves to the guidance of one of the weaker sex was as charming as it was unexpected. There were many arguments in favour of a girl. She would supply 'local colour,' she would pose as an effective foreground, she would sew on our buttons, she would play to us on her *samisen.*

"SHE WOULD PLAY TO US ON HER *SAMISEN*."

'She must be pretty,' said Kingston.

'And fairly young,' suggested Gordon.

'And of a cheerful disposition,' added I.

After a few minutes of silent thought, we began again.

'She must speak English,' said I.

'She must dress in Japanese costume,' remarked Gordon.

'She must be partial to Englishmen,' added Kingston.

But where and how to find this paragon of girls! Did Kobé contain her? Would advertising be of any use? Like the prince in the fairy-tale, we determined to test every Japanese maiden—not, however, with a glass slipper, but with a mental weighing apparatus, the weights being a complete set of moral and physical virtues. Needless to relate, we only doomed ourselves to disappointment. No tea-house contained the priceless pearl of whom we were in search. 'Weighed in the balance, and found wanting,' was the verdict, as time after time we sadly realized each candidate's shortcomings. One was cheerful, but not pretty; another spoke English, but was no longer young. Only in one essential they all came up to the mark—they all, without one exception, were partial to Englishmen. Kingston accounted for this unanimity of opinion on the ground of individuality; Gordon put it down to nationality; whereas I was convinced that

it sprang only from sexuality, and that had we hailed from France we would have been equally of opinion that all, without one exception, were partial to Frenchmen.

Such was the state of affairs when one day light broke upon our darkness, and from a state of depression our feelings were raised to a plane of satisfaction. Tōmi, hearing us discuss our proposed journey, and the difficulty attending the choice of a suitable guide, waited upon us with the suggestion :

'Karakamoko likee you take; thinkee good guide. Can do?'

'Karakamoko San!' We were electrified. The very thing! Pretty, young, amiable, speaks English, adores Englishmen. Why had we not thought of her before? What insular stupidity induced us to waste time and patience in searching the tea-houses of Kobé, when here at our very doors was the paragon of girls, the missing princess? At a meeting of the committee appointed to discover the apparently undiscoverable, Karakamoko was proposed, seconded, and passed amid a scene of wild enthusiasm.

On the following morning I interviewed Tōmi.

'Will go Nakasendo?' he asked anxiously.

I nodded.

'Karakamoko have for guide?'

I nodded again.

Tōmi's delight knew no bounds. The way he slapped his legs would have ruined any muscles but those of a ricksha man.

'Will be plenty nice fun!' he chuckled.

'I hope so,' I answered cautiously.

'You plenty good master!'

'Indeed!'

'I will take you Yokohama.'

So this was what the old sinner was aiming up to! I hardened my heart, and nipped his verdant hopes in the bud.

'It won't do, Tōmi.'

'Eh, how say?'

'I say it won't do. It would be too much happiness if you came, too—bad for us; you know, we must be careful of our health.'

'Will run plenty queek!' murmured poor, disappointed Tōmi, with a demi-semiquaver in his voice.

'It can't be. Think of Mrs. Tōmi; besides, you weren't even able to go to Akashi the other day, you old slow-coach!'

'Me no coach!' vociferated Tōmi indignantly. 'Me man! One queek, honest, jinricksha man. Have plenty fine legs. Ha! you ask me wife.'

'Keep them for her,' I advised laughingly, and with this parting shot I left him lamenting.

CHAPTER XVIII

OTZU

I THINK if this life consisted solely in saying good-bye, as some unhappy person once said of it, we would not survive very long. It would be too exciting. When the train steamed out of Kobé station, it bore three exhausted travellers in one of its first-class compartments—three sufferers from an acute attack of farewells, three victims to a regular conspiracy of good-byes. Our hotel bills led the van; saying good-bye to them was an expensive luxury. Several of our little friends, the shopkeepers, made their appearance at the last moment; their farewells were accompained by presents, which had to be reciprocated in coin of the realm. Then, Tōmi's behaviour was utterly uncalled for. It might be excusable in him to smell strongly of *saké*, and to try to make us lose our train—these were merely professional failings; but *was* it excusable to return change for five dollars when we had given him ten, or to charge more than treble fare for our drive to the station? We thought not. His memory, too, was strangely defective on that morning; his brain

appeared to be haunted by the ghosts of divers sums of money which he said we owed him, fabulous little amounts which rose from their graves in the receipted past and clamoured loudly for the attention of being discharged in the unpaid present.

At the station we became the uncomfortable centre of a large crowd of friends and relations. Gurgles and Giggles were, of course, to the fore ; they appeared overcome with grief. One fat uncle gave advice. Madam Tōmi sent love. Two or three shady-looking individuals (possibly poor relations) wandered about the platform, feeling very much out of place, evidently longing for it all to be over. It is a very overpowering sensation to be adopted by a Japanese family ; not even in the lost days of my boyhood did I envy Robinson Crusoe quite so much as during these affecting moments.

Karakamoko was the only cheerful person present. She consoled her sisters, chaffed the fat uncle, and laughed at everybody and everything with such infectious jollity that it made us almost cheerful to look at her. She had wrapped her luggage up in a pink table-cloth, which looked very comical when lying side by side with our European portmanteaus.

It goes without saying that the train was late —it always is on these occasions. We had a *mauvais quart d'heure* of 'Good-bye, Gurgles—don't cry any more. Good-bye, Giggles. Certainly not, Tōmi. You've had every cent out of us you can get.

No, we don't remember it; you must have dreamt it, you old sinner! Good-bye, sir. Oh, you're the fat uncle, are you? Glad to make your acquaintance. No, I don't object to shake hands again; it's only the fifth time. For Heaven's sake get in, Karakamoko; you'll be late. Eh, what's that you say? Love from Madam Tōmi? Too fat? I see—all right. Shut the door, for goodness' sake! Will this train never start! Good-bye again, Tōmi. No, I told you I didn't remember it. Good-bye—good-bye. There, off at last, thank Heaven!'

And we sank back exhausted on the padded seats.

Darkness had fallen before we reached Otzu. The night was raw and cheerless, with a small, steady rain falling which wetted us through before we gained the shelter of the inn. Our rooms were at the end of a narrow passage about two feet wide, over a little bridge and opening on to a most fantastic balcony. To gain them was a labour of infinite patience. Unexpected flights of stairs seemed to arise in the most useless manner, for they never allowed one to remain up after one had climbed them; there was always an opposition little flight waiting at the top for the express purpose of persuading one to come down again. The miniature bridge, too, was only a couple of yards across; but it made the most of the distance by arching its

back in a circular manner. It was very dark going over it. A little girl went before us with a paper lantern; otherwise we might have fallen over the narrow railings. Her quaint figure tripped along in a halo of light, through which we could see the raindrops glistening faintly. All else was lost in darkness.

She lighted our candles for us, smiling all the time, then waited a few minutes to chat with Karakamoko before going away.

'Only two rooms can have,' announced our little guide, as she tugged and puffed at the pink table-cloth.

'And how many beds?' I asked anxiously.

'Me thinkee three.'

'Oh!'

'Me sleep floor,' she went on cheerfully.

'You don't mind?' I asked.

'B'long all same.'

So it was arranged that a mattress was to be laid for her in a corner of my room.

Karakamoko dined with us that evening. It was an amusing experience. She handled her little ivory chopsticks daintily. Our curiosity at her tastes and quaint mode of eating delighted her, and she often leant back to laugh at us with a quite irresistible merriment. Morsels of raw fish floating in oil, green plums coated with brilliantly coloured sugar, stuffed shrimps, seaweed with scented sauce, made

their appearance one after another on a multitude of tiny plates.

A party of students were dining in the same room. They were merry fellows, and chaffed the stout lady of the inn unmercifully. She liked their banter, although she made a great pretence of indignation now and then, a feint which was received by roars of laughter. Her two daughters—pretty young women—helped her to wait, and were evidently as great favourites with the Otzu young men as their mother.

After dinner we all smoked. Karakamoko had the daintiest smoking outfit possible. On the slender stem of her pipe a tiny lizard was practising gymnastics. The bowl was chased silver, and the tobacco-pouch, of soft leather, was decorated with filigree figures carved in the same metal. Seated on a huge cushion, she made a pretty picture. Her lips puffed out the smoke in thin little streams; her eyes, half closed in dreamy *dolce far niente*, showed the fringe of curved lashes against the warm softness of her cheeks.

The students were saying good-night: we could hear their merry voices and the giggles of the girls as they streamed down the narrow staircase. All at once a sound of splashing water was heard.

'Hot bath,' explained Karakamoko. 'Will take?' she asked, as she put the tiny lizard to bed in a morocco case.

'Yes, I'd like one,' I said.

'So should I,' joined in Kingston.

'It is probably a public bathing-room,' remarked Gordon.

'Anyone else having baths, Caricature?' asked Kingston.

'Will go see.' In a few minutes she came back and said, 'Very nice bath.'

'Who is there?'

'One house-lady, two girl, and me.'

'You finish first and call us,' said Gordon.

I was ready before the others, so, when Karakamoko's face appeared round the corner of the screen which stood in front of the bedroom door, I followed her out on to the dark veranda. Her candle spluttered as the raindrops splashed the wick. The glimmering light flickered on the old woodwork and danced along like a Will-o'-the-wisp in front of me. The black eaves projected over the narrow passage and sheltered us a little, but on the bridge and other exposed places we were sprinkled with the steady rain. I stumbled after her as best I could, cursing the distorted imagination of the architect who had planned all these breakneck steps and man-trap surprises. Another light zigzagged up to us. It was the landlady. She was holding a paper umbrella over her wonderful back-hair and shedding a pleasant atmosphere of hot water and cleanliness around.

The bathroom was an outhouse. Door there was

none; at least, I never found it. It is impossible for me to say how large it was, either externally or internally. The darkness outside prevented me seeing the one; the steam inside prevented me seeing the other. Out of this haze came the sound of splashing, squealing, and laughter. I drew back.

'You told me it was all ready,' said I to Karakamoko in a tone of remonstrance.

'Yes, all ready.'

'But someone is there still.'

'No will hurt,' she said soothingly.

'No—o. I suppose not. Who is it?

'Only two house-girl.'

'Landlady's daughters?'

Yes.'

'They won't like it. I say, what are you laughing at?'

'You speakee too muchee funny.'

'Oh, do I? Thank you. Glad to amuse you. Where is my bath? There is no one in that, I hope?'

'He! he! he!' she gurgled musically.

'Oh, I've been funny again, eh? I seem to be very amusing to-night. I can't see in this fog.'

'Give me hand.'

'Here you are.'

We groped our way in At last we came to something.

'You all right,' murmured Karakamoko; 'feel bath?'

'Yes. I say! don't go away; don't leave me with these mermaids. You haven't introduced us yet. Karakamoko! I say! Stop!'

But she was gone. An echo of laughter came from the passage. Her receding light twinkled a moment through the haze, then vanished.

The splashing continued. What a noise they were making! I stood in the middle of the moist, warm steam-clouds and shivered. A dim lamp somewhere, not far off, looked like the moon floating in evening mists; its light was silvery and nebulous.

'Confound these fellows!' I thought; 'what the mischief keeps them? And that young fiend Karakamoko! See if I don't pay her out for this!'

A squeal, followed by two bursts of laughter, was heard above the splashing. It sounded nearer. Shading my eyes, I peered into the damp haze. No, it was quite impossible to see anything clearly. A bright thought occurred to me. Were I to slip into my bath and get well under the surface, I might still escape detection. Good idea; but I must be quiet —yes, *very* quiet. I felt for the edge of my bath, paused a moment irresolute, then threw discretion and my dressing-gown to the winds and took the fatal plunge.

Ye gods! if I live to a hundred I shall never forget the agony of that moment. The water was

boiling! How I yelled! It was all up with me. Like Cæsar, I had burnt my bridges, but, unlike that great man, I had burnt my body also, so I was doubly desperate. Leaving decency and skin behind, I sprang for *terra-firma*. At that moment I caught sight of two girlish figures running towards me. Themselves innocent of clothing, they appeared unnecessarily amused at my state of nature.

Modesty suggested flight, so, snatching up my one garment, I fled without a word into the night air.

CHAPTER XIX

THE MOTH AND THE DRAGON

The bathing was over. The merciless chaffing of my friends had been lived through. My smarting body had been laid to rest in cool sheets. Quiet had fallen at last over the rambling old house and its merry inmates.

The undressing process had been as public as the bathing one. Kingston had stumbled over the landlady saying her prayers in her nightgown, and had finished up with nearly killing the cook, who had rashly made her bed in a dark corner of the passage.

Karakamoko's toilet was full of surprises. The number of things which she concealed in her sleeves would astonish even the 'Heathen Chinee.' I lay semi-dreaming, and watched her with lazy interest. The rain pattered fitfully on the paper panes. A light wind had sprung up and stirred something outside, which rattled with a dull, muffled sound every now and then. A dog barked once, another one answered him faintly from a distance, the second one sounding like a weird echo of the first. I could

imagine how dreary and dark it must be in the deserted streets and lonely, wind-swept spaces of the benighted city, and how the great lake Biwa, which stretched beyond, must be shrouded in gloom.

Within our room a candle flickered in the far corner; the shade was a green dragon with fearsome tail, which seemed to live again in dancing shadow upon the opposite wall. The softly-shaded light was toned to faintest emerald, and tinted everything with a reflection which made the commonest objects seem dream-like and unreal. Karakamoko moved softly to and fro, her huge sleeves giving her quite the air of a gray moth hovering about the room. Here and there, backwards and forwards, she stole with noiseless tread, returning always, spell-bound as it were, to the fascinating dragon, as he waited wizard-like in his circle of mysterious green light.

It was very still. The patter of the rain was the only sound to be heard, murmuring softly out there in the darkness in low-toned, even monotony.

How strange it was to have my lot cast even for a few autumn days with this comical little figure! How curious that our lives should clasp hands for a moment, and then move on to be lost to each other for ever in the crowding years! We had so little in common, were so different—she and I. The only binding links were a little money and a little laughter, and, yes, I think, the same delight in our rambling

life, with its sunshine and shower, and the same wish to make it a happy remembrance to look back upon pleasantly, perhaps even regretfully, when the autumn had carried it off as lightly as if it were but a tinted leaf or faded flower.

A drowsy warmth stole over me. I felt glad to be so comfortable and cosy when all the outer world was cold and damp and cheerless. A delicious feeling of laziness pervaded my tired body. Ideas flitted fast through my mind—shadowy, indistinct; many impatient fancies, which had not time to come to me before, now started into sight, treading on each other's heels in their hurry. My eyelids grew heavier and heavier. My senses swayed as they peeped over sleep's abyss. My thoughts rambled on in this wise:

'Am I in Japan or only in a picture-book? Have I stepped back over the long years into some forgotten fairyland? Am I only a thought of some old-world illustrator, or am I a childhood's dream, and will the little dreamer wake up soon and feel sorry to find that I am not a true dream, after all? Is Karakamoko a girl, or only a moth? It is a long name for a moth; perhaps it is Latin. She will burn her wings if she flies so near the green dragon. Very foolish of her; I must tell her in the morning if I can only remember. Think of moths; but, then, one never sees moths by daylight. No moths! no moths! how annoying! I must complain to the

landlady; she will apologize if she can only remember. What is the moth doing now? Taking off its wings—how funny! Will it fold them? Is that the wind snoring, or is it the rain? I must complain if I can only remember. Why is the green dragon winking? Perhaps it is an extra! "Winking, two dollars;" I must com—— Is the moth speaking? It is saying "Good-night!" How odd! I will answer after breakfast if I can only re——'

And so I fell asleep.

The green dragon still winked on, but there was no one to watch him; the rain still pattered on the paper panes, but there was no one to hear it. The old house was all shadow now, for sleep—like the wicked fairy in the children's tale—had cast the spell of her enchantment over the many rooms and all their weary occupants.

CHAPTER XX

HIKONE—TARUI

THERE was much bustle and excitement on the following morning, for an early start had been agreed upon, as we had a good day's journey before us. Karakamoko was dancing about, now tugging at the pink table-cloth, trying to find a way in without undoing the elaborate knots, now trying her best to pack for me, much to my silent despair. Her idea of packing was curious. I found a razor and tooth-brush in one boot, and a piece of soap and a little writing-paper in the other. My sponge was wrapped up in my pyjamas, and my few books were carefully stowed away in my sponge-bag. She was so happy and so delighted at her cleverness in looking after 'Watson Sama's' outfit that I had not the heart to scold her.

'Very nice, Karakamoko,' I said, as I looked at her sadly—'very nice indeed. These are my best trousers, not brown paper, so don't wrap my boots in them. Ah! I thought you wouldn't like the taste of that. It's tooth-powder. What is it for?

No, I don't drink it. Oh, I say! do run away and ask Kingston Sama how old he was last birthday.'

Before she came back I had managed to repack my insulted belongings, and felt a little more comfortable.

Hastening over breakfast, we said good-bye to the landlady and her buxom daughters. They were loath to let us go. We had afforded them so much amusement, they said.

We walked down to the lake where the little steamer lay which was to take us to the village of Hikone.

Our party was the only one which patronized the first-class; the steerage, however, was crowded to suffocation. The accommodation on board was limited. Kingston and I were the first to enter the cabin; we completely blocked it up.

Gordon and Karakamoko stood at the door and laughed. Gordon had to stoop nearly double even to look in.

'Don't laugh like that,' implored Kingston. 'You'll sink the vessel.'

'Hullo! who is there?' I cried.

Gordon had disappeared, and a little yellow-faced man was peering in with an expression of perplexity.

'It's the captain,' called Gordon's voice. 'He wants to get in; one of you fellows must come out.

When we came on deck, Otzu was left far behind. We were steaming along at a great rate through

the pearl-gray mists which had begun to waver and break. Soon the sun peeped out of this silvery haze, and sparkled brightly on the waves as they chased each other over the surface of the lake. Now and then a dark-timbered fishing-boat loomed into sight, the voices of the crew ringing out in cheery salutation as we steamed past them; or some unknown water-bird, disturbed by our approach, flitted across our bows with strange, questioning cry and rapid motion of its long, dripping wings.

We leant over the taffrail, and watched the distant shores slowly emerging from the mist. There was a delicious freshness in this mist-laden air, cool as if drawn from the depths of some glacier, and yet not without a tinge of warm colour where the gold of the sunrise trembled on the waters.

Hikone nestles in a wooded valley at some distance from the line of curving lake coast. Our arrival was gratifying to its inhabitants; they seemed to take it as a delicate compliment to their picturesque village, a thoughtful attention which brought much simple happiness to every face. The children, too, made much of us. We must have proved a serious rival to the local travelling menagerie.

Soon we were seated in our little carriages, baggage strapped on, tea-house girls resisted, good-

byes said, and we were off—actually off on our ricksha ramble through Central Japan.

There was a delightful feeling of novelty in all we saw; every object claimed our attention by the quite irresistible charm of never having been seen before. The quaintly picturesque character of the smiling landscape; the little villages dotted here and there; the curious outlandish appearance of their inhabitants, so strangely foreign to English eyes; the luxuriant wealth of summer foliage just warming into the more mellowed brilliancy of early autumn—all cast a spell over us, a spell the extent of whose fascination was none the less charming by being drawn from hidden well-springs reaching far back into the past.

Every turn of the undulating road contained fresh surprises, every crest of overtopping hill prepared unimagined delights, every leafy barrier concealed long vistas of unfamiliar country stretching on and on, all full of unknown pleasures, all waiting patiently in the warm sunlight for us to come and make their acquaintance. There they had waited year after year, century after century, lost—as far as we were concerned—in mere hearsay, mere geography-land, till we had grown to fancy them but as dim creations of some imaginative brain, like lost Atlantis submerged under the Atlantic swell. It is so easy to deceive us when we are children, that we are apt to grow sceptical after-

wards; indeed, my travelling frame of mind is one long mental apology to my school geography for having ventured to disbelieve it.

Yes, our spirits were high. Our sunshine had, as someone quaintly says, more than the usual measure of gold in it. We were so happy that Gordon and I actually refrained from scolding Kingston when he spoilt the harmony of the scene by bursting into song.

We have all of us our little pleasant delusion about the one accomplishment we fondly believe we excel in. It is very pathetic to see us clinging with unalterable faith to this dreamlit mirage, perhaps when it is very old and has long ceased to excite admiration, or even attention. How we exalt our little speciality far above all others! How we magnify it! 'I can't play the fiddle,' exclaims Mr. A., with modest superiority in his voice, 'but, by Jove! I *can* make claret-cup!'

Sometimes this Will-o'-the-wisp leads us only into the innocent fields of fire-lighting, tea-making, or potato-planting, but at others it allures us into the outer darkness of tuneless song. That was Kingston's case. He said it was called 'Bonnie Dundee'; we had to believe him, for we recognised the words. It had a chorus, a wonderful Kingstonian noise that sounded like 'Rowdy-dowdy-dow.' He said the way to sing it was 'not to feel shy,' to 'let yourself go'—to 'put beef into it.' I quote his own expressions

without any attempt to translate them into English. He accompanied this chorus with his walking-stick, using the ricksha splash-boards as an impromptu drum. It made his ricksha man very nervous. We could escape, but he, poor fellow! was doomed to listen. There was much unconscious irony in his situation: he could never even hope to run away from it.

Darkness found us still plodding onwards. At last Tarui was reached, and we dashed up the chief street of the little town, our coolies yelling loudly the peculiar ricksha cry that the traveller learns to know so well.

The inn was called 'Kame-Ya.' Mine host led us into the guest-room, a spacious apartment which he introduced to our notice in a long flowery speech punctuated with bows.

'He say nice room,' translated Karakamoko.

'Kept only for distinguished guests,' added Gordon.

'At a distinguished price,' chuckled Kingston.

A wheezing and blowing were heard outside the panel door. Soon a curious head appeared, then two plump shoulders, and finally a chubby little *mousmé* crawled into the room on hands and knees.

'Can't she walk, poor thing?' asked Kingston sympathetically.

Karakamoko giggled audibly.

'Do ask her to walk,' we entreated.

The little maid seemed much embarrassed by our request; however, upon our insisting she eventually gave in with many protestations and excuses.

When the velvet cushions were laid in position, a tiny charcoal fire was brought in and tea served in the usual diminutive cups.

'Karakamoko!' we called.

'Yes?' came a little voice from behind my portmanteau.

'We have each had seven cups of tea; when are they going to bring us something to eat?'

'You hungry?'

'Don't chaff; it's serious.'

'Call the landlord,' suggested Gordon.

'And tell him we want dinner,' implored Kingston.

Then Karakamoko and the little man enjoyed a long and apparently most entertaining conversation. We sat and listened to their jokes.

'Well?' I suggested.

'He! he! thinkee wait a minute.'

'What does he say about dinner?'

'He say no can have.'

'Why not?'

'Oh, muchee too late.'

'Tell him to give us a substantial tea, then.'

'Tea have had.'

'Oh, we won't quarrel with its name. Call it breakfast if you like, only let us eat it.'

'He thinkee no can do,' came the consoling answer.

We looked at the landlord. The expression in the eyes of three men who have fasted since early morning must be rather fearsome. The little man was fat; Englishmen might be cannibals, for anything he knew to the contrary.

'Have you fish?' I asked reproachfully.

When this idea had been translated, his face lost its anxious look, and a large smile stole gently across its broad expanse.

'Plenty nice fish; you come see.'

A torch was found; Kingston supplied a match. Our host armed himself with a long, deadly-looking spear, and Karakamoko told us that the fishing had begun. It looked very dark outside. I thought of the warlike spear, and wondered what dreadful aquatic monsters were lurking out there in the night, perhaps expecting our arrival. The torch flared fitfully as the cold breeze fanned it. We groped our way single file, the spearman courageously leading the attacking party. It was some time before we could make out where we were, but at last a sort of half-pond, half-rockery, dawned upon us; it was spanned by a number of tiny bridges. On one of these Karakamoko took up her position; she just filled it comfortably. The dark

water sparkled where the light touched it. We peered into it in breathless suspense. A solemn silence ensued. All at once a frog, who had been dazed by the unexpected light, recovered his presence of mind, and 'took a header' into the pond.

'Ha!' shouted the landlord, brandishing his weapon.

'Have see fish,' explained our little guide, with great satisfaction. A moment of silent suspense, then splash went another frog. Down came the spear. Karakamoko and the bridge trembled with excitement, but, alas! the fish was not, and we eyed the would-be sportsman hungrily.

'Did you see him?' asked Kingston.

'Ha!' grunted the landlord, with great energy.

'Well, try again; steady! That's a good one—got anything? What bad luck!'

At this moment we were interrupted by the arrival of the plump maid, walking this time just like an ordinary human being. She made a remark which caused Karakamoko and the landlord to shout with laughter. The bridge fairly shook with merriment.

'Don't keep the joke all to yourself,' I remonstrated at last.

'He! he! she say last fish have died two week ago!'

CHAPTER XXI

THROUGH THE RAIN TO GIFU

'SHO-O-O! Why you not get up? Sho-o-o! Sho-o-o!'

I rubbed my eyes. The gray of the dawn glimmered through the paper panes.

'I think you might leave me alone,' I expostulated. 'It can't be long after midnight.'

'Ow!' exclaimed a familiar voice. 'Plenty day outside; me thinkee velly late.'

I looked up. Karakamoko was bending over me. Her own simple toilet had been made, and she was devoting all her energies to rousing her refractory charges. Her habits were matutinal. Bed appeared to possess no charms for Karakamoko; and, indeed, it is hardly to be wondered at. Japanese beds are not luxurious, and the pillow alone—of black wood, necessary for the preservation of the elaborate coils of hair—would be sufficient to account for any reluctance on her part to pass more than a short space of time in so uncomfortable an attitude. But with us it was otherwise. We had no coils of hair to preserve. We had no ambition to assist at the sun-

rise. We enjoyed bed. Enveloped in immense opossum rugs, which formed a necessary part of our travelling outfit, the early morning hours seemed to us a blissful period broken only by the inevitable waking-up process, in which performance Karakamoko played an active part. In order to postpone the evil hour, we had recourse to many artful stratagems, such as festooning our clothing in front of the paper panes to keep out the early light, or pretending to be asleep when we heard her flitting about the room; but these innocent deceptions were useless, for our little guide had much of the persistent patience of the fly when it disturbs the slumberer on some warm summer's afternoon.

'What is the weather like?' I asked sleepily.

'Muchee bad—plenty rain,' answered Karakamoko.

I crossed to the panel window and drew it aside; the frame slid easily in the white grooves. A dull leaden sky stretched over the sea of dripping roofs. The rain fell steadily, monotonously. The few passers-by hurried along under large oilskin umbrellas beneath which they were all but concealed from sight.

There was something dismal about our little room seen in the imperfect light of a rainy day. The want of furniture and complete absence of decoration gave it a swept and garnished appearance, as of an empty house in the abandoned interval between the old occupants and the new. The paper panes had a wan, gray look, very different from the sunlit trans-

parency of brighter days. The very lacquer had lost its winking jollity, and had dulled down to complete harmony with the leaden skies overhead.

We cooked our breakfast over a tiny charcoal stove, called *hibachi*, which was brought up to us from the public apartment downstairs. It was not a luxurious meal. It consisted of bacon and water-biscuits, washed down by innumerable cups of green tea. The two former articles of diet we had brought from Kobé; they were the last straws that bound us to civilization. We three men took it in turns to cook. It would go hard to say who was worst at it. Karakamoko looked on. Karakamoko's culinary accomplishments were one of the pleasing little fictions which had led us into the paths of conducted travel. After the agony of partaking of the first meal cooked by Karakamoko, we unanimously agreed that it was ungallant to expect the only lady of our party to cook as well as guide. It was, on the face of it, unreasonable. How could a being who apparently existed on sugar-plums be expected to turn her attention to anything so gross as grilled bacon?

Tim, tum! tim, tum! came the muffled sound of a *samisen* from one of the many little rooms around us. Some performer was taking advantage of the rainy morning to practise 'break-downs.' Chattering and laughing, too, found their way up to us, awakening Karakamoko's curiosity, for, leaving the breakfast-

plates half washed, she tripped away to inquire the cause of the merriment.

In the course of the morning we had many visitors. The news of our arrival had spread among the good people of Tarui, and particularly among our neighbours in the 'Kame-Ya,' for they appeared anxious to make our acquaintance. Three or four girls were the first who ventured to inspect the big foreigners. We were made conscious of their arrival by a sound of suppressed giggling which came from behind the paper walls. They were in a flutter of girlish excitement, but were too shy to enter. They hoped that we would take the masculine prerogative of making advances, perhaps even take them captive, whereupon they would have paid their ransom in *samisen* music and laughter. However, as we pretended not to hear them, and as the walls showed no convenient crack through which we might be inspected, they grew bolder. At last one, more inventive than the rest, thrust her finger through a paper pane, and applied an eye to the hole. This was greeted with loud 'Ha's!' of approval. In an instant many holes were made, and our privacy was a thing of the past.

One of our masculine visitors caused us at first much amusement. How he made up his mind to visit us at all I cannot imagine, for he was one of those unfortunate beings who appear to be without a mind to make up. He came into our room slowly. When he found himself among us he smiled. We

looked at him with answering smiles. Indeed, it would have been difficult not to smile at so comical an object. His hair was brushed into two wisps, which stood stiffly up behind his ears. His back was arched until his hands rested on his knees. His teeth were few and far between. His smile was masklike in its grotesque and unwavering fixity. We hoped that he would either say something or go away. He did neither; he simply stood there and smiled. From being amusing he became painful, and it was with feelings of intense relief that we at last witnessed his ejection by the landlord.

Towards noon the weather showed signs of clearing, the sun making an effectual effort to struggle through the fast-driving clouds, so we thought it best to take advantage of the break and make a push for Gifu. Karakamoko's announcement that rickshas were required was the signal for a scene of much excitement. Ricksha competition ran high at Tarui. Our little guide became the centre of a noisy crowd. High above the clamour rang her voice in indignant Japanese as she protested loudly against what appeared to be the extortionate demands of the coolies. At last the excitement calmed down, and we ventured to ask :

'Have you made a good bargain, Karakamoko?'

'Ha! me thinkee yes; five ricksha can do for ten sen a ri.'

This, roughly speaking, might be called fivepence for two and a half miles, and gives a very fair idea of the cost of ricksha travelling in Central Japan.

Karakamoko and the pink tablecloth led the cavalcade. The landlord, whose feelings had been soothed by an unquestioning acceptance on our part of many imaginative extras, bade us farewell on the doorstep, and we left him surrounded by his retainers, all in circular positions, which we tried in vain to imitate. We made an imposing procession as we dashed along the streets of Tarui in single file, the yellow mud splashing in showers from our ricksha wheels. Hardly had we left the town behind us, and were toiling along a country lane, than down came the rain in torrents. A sudden halt was called, and all attention was directed to lowering the ricksha hoods and drawing the tattered coverings more closely around us. Our rickshas had seen better days. Mine had been a sumptuous little carriage, for here and there I could still see the scraps of red lacquer that clung to its shafts and wheels. Great age and hard work had left their mark, and it was difficult to imagine that this dirt-begrimed, travel-worn little vehicle had once been the possession of a possible Princess, and that these torn coverings had sheltered some Oriental beauty from sunshine and storm. The hood and apron were made of thin yellow oilskin, which crackled like parchment at every movement. Their condition was highly un-

satisfactory. Rents seamed them in many places, some were rudely darned with cord, others yawned widely without even this rough semblance of respectability. Ricksha travelling is not all pleasure. That afternoon gave us an idea of its seamy side. The rain, taking advantage of the flaws in the oilskin, was not long in finding me out, and before long I was seated in a pool of water, while a shower-bath sprinkled me liberally from overhead. Through a rent in my curtain I could see my coolie splashing steadily forwards at the same even pace. He had divested himself of all clothing, save the merest rag, and in this light and airy costume he rose superior to wind and weather. The water streamed down his naked body in little rivulets, and the polished skin shone again in wet lights where the gleam of the early afternoon grayness rested upon it. It was wonderful with what tender solicitude this rough fellow regarded me. Time and again he would laugh back over his shoulder in cheery encouragement. With his own hands he tucked me into my little coach with unknown words of apparent apology for the condition of the yellow oilskin. A gesticulation towards the mists that shrouded the far horizon, accompanied as it was with the most hopeful of smiles, was more explicit. 'A little patience, noble sir,' it seemed to say—'a little patience, and we will arrive at Gifu.' It needed but little patience, however, to laugh back at the cheery fellow.

The roads were execrable. At times a pool of mud, of more than a foot in depth, had to be forded, and as we jolted through it the idea of a possible upset made me shudder. The wind rose steadily, and fierce gusts lashed us with big rain. My hands grew chill in the vain endeavour to shield myself with the tattered coverings. How I longed for our destination! The physical discomfort at last resulted in a numbness of the senses, and I watched the passing scenery, the wind-tossed foliage, the rain-drenched roads, with indifference as complete as if it were not I, but another with whom I had little in common, that was experiencing them under such unpleasant conditions. On and on we plodded. Sometimes a peasant trudged heavily past, his big wooden clogs splashing through the yellow puddles and his back bent before the driving rain. For the most part, however, the road was deserted, and when the twilight closed in upon us the scene was one of the most cheerless that can be imagined.

A visit from Japanese Custom-house officials is a solemn and imposing ceremony.

The little picnic, which Karakamoko dignified by the name of 'dinner,' was scarcely over when the sleeping echoes of the inn resounded to the tread of many feet. The old staircase groaned audibly. It was so accustomed to being patted gently by soft stocking-soles that to be suddenly desecrated by

boots must have been painful to it. The clang and clatter of scabbards mounting step by step rang out of the darkness.

We sat still and waited their arrival in clouds of tobacco-smoke. The shadow of the law is a fearsome thing, but, as we were unable to recall anything worthy of death or imprisonment committed in the immediate past, we felt hopeful.

'Ha!' exclaimed Karakamoko breathlessly, as she burst into the room. 'Soldier mans!—come see passport.'

'Tell them to come in,' I said.

Three little uniforms quick-marched into the room; six little boots creaked loudly. Wheeling into line formation, they saluted. They were the most melancholy mechanical toys I had seen. They seemed to feel the depressing dignity of having been 'made in Germany.' The stern mould of army discipline had left its trade-mark upon them. Every pleasant characteristic trait had been stamped out, to give place, alas! to nothing but the dead uniformity of the man-killing machine. To compare their past with their present was as saddening as to draw a comparison between a fresh fig and a dried one, or between a herring in the full enjoyment of its natural element and the crushed possessor of the thousandth part of a barrel. It was a melancholy metamorphosis. One could not help feeling that there, lost somewhere inside these neat little uniforms—coffined, as

it were, in these European shells—there were imprisoned three merry, courteous little Japs, all longing to laugh, to bow, to make friends, restrained only by the remembrance of the drill-sergeant and the fear of being thought natural.

They began to take notes in cheap pocket-books, referring many times to our passports with evident pride in being able to read. The smallest man had no pencil. I offered him mine; the little fellow accepted it gratefully.

When they filed down the dark staircase, they left a shadow behind them—the shadow of the West blotting out the sunshine of the East.

Karakamoko was the first to dispel this gloom. She had been conversing confidentially with our landlord; the result of this conversation was the question:

'You like see paint?'

'Paint?' we questioned thoughtfully.

'Yes, paint on paper.'

'Oh!'

'You like see?'

'Who paints on paper?' I asked.

Karakamoko pointed one chubby finger at the door. We could hear someone breathing loudly behind it.

'Landlord?' I guessed.

She nodded.

'Tell him all like see.'

I have rarely seen such simple happiness as

beamed from the landlord's ugly face when Karakamoko led him into the room. Three artistic Englishmen in one day were almost too much for the human heart. The work of art took as long to unwind as a mummy; at last, however, it unrolled into candle-light, and he passed it to us with a would-be depreciative air, through which naïve joy shone brightly.

We took the picture, and, bringing it nearer to our one candle, bent over it with much curiosity. A silence followed. I never before have found myself face to face with such a mystery as that painting. We looked long at its weird hieroglyphics. The longer we studied it, the more of a mystery it became; we held it in many lights, we shaded our eyes, we consulted the happy expression of the landlord, but all in vain. The situation was becoming unbearable.

'Say what think,' whispered Karakamoko nervously, tugging my sleeve. Excellent advice, O most quaint of guides! but utterly impossible to follow.

Then the artist interfered.

'What for you lookee upside downside?' translated Karakamoko.

We reversed the picture in confusion.

Japanese paintings have a saddening effect on me. I cannot pass a Japanese curiosity shop, even now, without feeling a sense of humiliation, for

among the collection of oddities I am sure to see some scrap of incomprehensible colour which recalls the close of that evening at Gifu, our silent struggles with Oriental art, the anxiety of Karakamoko, and the final explosion of Kingston which drove the disappointed landlord from the room.

I awakened suddenly that night, starting from the warm tyranny of dreamless sleep with a sensation of wonder, which resolved itself into the three words, 'Where am I?' It began with a delightfully comfortable indifference, a lazy speculation as if I were discussing the probable whereabouts of some stranger, of someone too far off to awake any real interest within me. Then as ideas dawned into definite form, as isolated fragments of memory pieced themselves together, suddenly the remembrance—*This is Japan!*—flashed across my mind. I almost laughed in drowsy derision, it seemed so impossible. The notion refused to leave me, however, so at last I lay listening, watching for some corroboration of the fantastic idea. As I waited a tiny glow caught my eye, a little red spark brightening and dulling alternately, while over me there floated a faint aromatic odour of Japanese tobacco. I smiled contentedly; of course—how stupid of me to forget! It was Karakamoko indulging in her midnight smoke. With a sigh of satisfaction I closed my eyes and fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXII

MITAKE

It is very pleasant to come out-of-doors in the early hours, when strong lights lie on the scarce-awakened world, and the freshness of the morning lingers still on leaf and flower. The air is exquisitely cool and clear—a limpid transparency—full of the purity that precedes the dawn. Dim shadows float in the hollows of the hills. The foliage of the woodlands is drenched in dew ; it glitters faintly in chill, wet lights. Tall trees stand motionless in the breathless air. A sense of expectancy seems to pervade the scene. Man appears strangely out of place at such an hour, an alien, an intruder, for the noise and movement of humanity is far removed from the peace and serenity of Nature. The pearl-gray mists are shot with opaline lights ; strangely beautiful they appear as they advance and recede before every suspicion of wandering air. As we watch, a roseate flush tinges the horizon line, the cicadæ tune up for their long concert, a bird awakens into song, and the lovely autumn day springs into being.

All this and more repaid us a thousandfold for our

early start from Gifu. But, early as we were, the labourers in the little fields were earlier still. There they were, digging energetically, wielding the rude farm implements with unconscious grace, their quickened breath rising into the frosty atmosphere like the smoke from many joss-sticks. The interest which our appearance aroused was tinged always with amazement. It is ever so among Eastern peoples; they cannot for the life of them imagine what you do so far from home. Travel for the sake of travel is incomprehensible to them. Even Karakamoko wondered.

'Why you here?' she asked gravely on one occasion.

'To see Japan,' I answered with corresponding gravity.

'Ha!' she ejaculated; but her tone implied doubt.

'England not nice place?' she went on.

'Very nice,' I assured her.

'No nice girl to love?'

'On the contrary, there are many girls to love.'

'Then, why you here?'

The idea of a man with a 'nice place' to live in, and a 'nice girl to love,' flying in the face of Providence by scouring the globe appeared to her little short of lunacy. This incomprehensible peculiarity of ours endeared us still more to her. We were evidently not to be trusted alone. A keeper was

indispensable. When a woman considers herself indispensable there is no more to be said. She takes up the reins of government in a manner so decided that the merely masculine element gives in at once.

That noon-day halt was a pleasant experience. It was very warm. The sunshine lay—a luminous sea—on the drowsy land. It streamed everywhere —this golden inundation—over hamlet and plain, over mountain and valley. I was lying on my back in the long grass, awaiting the hour for starting. The others were I knew not where—I did not even care, so steeped was I in the delights of that warm illumination.

With half-closed eyes I gazed upwards into the deep vault above me.

A large cloud was approaching from the west, a marvel of ethereal formation. The drifting wonder of its uplands and ravines was sweeping along in the infinity of tractless blue. There was a sublime dignity in its calm advance. It appeared to be sailing slowly, but its pace in those far regions of air must have been that of a tempest; and yet, O marvel of marvels! not a line wavered, not a form trembled, but precipice after precipice, and mountain after mountain, it swept resistlessly forward, with the speed of the morning in its wings and all the witchery of natural loveliness in its stately, sunlit flight.

The day was drawing to a close when we stopped for the night at the village of Mitake. The homely little inn rejoiced in the fine-sounding name of Nonoguchi-ya.

Mitake is a quaint little place, seemingly composed of one street winding upwards on the rough, uneven road to where the birches thicken and the maples redden against the sky-line. The hamlets of gray timber are stained with many a dark streak and weather-beaten shadow; the emerald moss nestles in their crannies, and the silver lichen clings to their stout beams; and silver and emerald combine to beautify and soften the crudeness of the old logs which support the uneven roofs. They are sturdy little dwellings, these Mitake cottages, for all that they are rough-and-ready as the mountain rocks on which they are built. Shoulder to shoulder they stand and face the winter storms, with broad eaves pulled down like caps over their window-eyes, and big boulders dotted here and there on their shingle roofs to prevent the fierce gales carrying them bodily away, as they shriek past on their path of destruction.

On that evening, however, they looked peaceful and homely. The blue smoke curled lightly up from their rude chimneys, and at the open doors the old women were sitting—the twilight of Life enjoying the twilight of the perfect autumnal day. Over the fringe of foliage the sky shone—a cold, delicate

green from which the last trace of the sunset had vanished.

The shadows were mustering in the village street, stealing from out the voiceless woods, at first one by one, then faster and faster as the minutes passed and the pure light faded imperceptibly in the west. As Gordon and I lingered outside, the air grew chill, a star peeped out far overhead and winked at us across the millions of pale-green miles, and from the purple depths of the valley the voice of the river greeted us with hoarse music.

At this moment a familiar little voice called to us from an upper window of the inn :

'What for not come in ? You catchee cold.'

So we joined her in the neat little guest-room of the tea-house, and presently forgot the gathering night with all its attendant train closing in so stealthily and silently upon the dusky hamlet and its weary inhabitants.

CHAPTER XXIII

BY NAKATSUGAWA TO OCHIAI

WHERE was Karakamoko? The hour for starting had arrived, and she was nowhere to be seen. At last, after much search, she was discovered in the miniature garden, indulging in a violent flirtation with the landlord—a gay old man of sixty.

'You should not flirt,' I remarked severely.

'What that mean?' she asked innocently, with her head daintily posed on one side like an inquisitive canary.

This was embarrassing! How could I possibly define flirtation so that she would understand me? And even if I could make my meaning intelligible, would my Western notions be in keeping with her unsophisticated nature and primitive Japanese training?

'Oh, well! when a fellow likes a girl, but doesn't mean business; or when a girl means nothing, and does a great deal—you understand *that,* I hope?'

'N-o-o,' she murmured dubiously.

'You really have a lot to learn.'

'Yes,' she assented modestly.

'Look here: what did that old man want when he held your hand?'

'He want see if nice.'

'Oh, did he! And afterwards?'

'He thinkee velly nice.'

'Well, that's flirtation.'

Karakamoko gave a contented little sigh.

'Me like flutteration,' she said simply.

My little sermon was not being as successful as I had hoped, so I began again:

'You shouldn't do it, you know.'

'Why not do?'

'Because it's too—well, too pleasant, I suppose; we should never do anything we like very much in this world.'

'You never do flutteration, Watson Sama?'

Really, this young person was making too much progress.

'Look here, Karakamoko: we've no time to talk like this. We must be off. Have you ordered the rickshas?'

Did I see an ironical twinkle in her merry eyes, as she replied sweetly, 'Me will go see'? I think I did.

We had some difficulty in engaging four ricksha men for the day's journey. Two of our coolies who had brought us from Gifu offered their services; the

others were obliged to go home, and had started on the return journey before daybreak. One of our old hands lived at Mitake. He was a fine specimen of up-country ricksha man. He had taken a fancy to us, and while Gordon and Karakamoko were scouring the village in search of fresh men, he offered to take Kingston and me to his house. His name was Hosuke, and he had picked up a little English during a two years' stay in Yokohama.

His cottage was the picture of cleanliness. His wife received us on her knees, and appeared quite overcome by the unexpected honour of our visit. We asked him if they lived alone, or if there were more of the family? It was not easy to explain our meaning to him, but at last he seemed to understand, and led us into another room at the back of his tiny dwelling.

In this inner room an old woman was sitting, nearly bent double over a charcoal stove. She must have been very old, for her face was a curious network of wrinkles, and her hair was like a patch of last year's snow. Death seemed to have forgotten her, or perhaps he knew that she was willing to totter away with him whenever he held out his hand, and so, as he could get her easily, he kept her waiting. Death is sometimes very human. She was crooning softly in a weird falsetto when we disturbed her, in a voice so thin and soft that it scarcely stirred the quiet air. Standing by her side,

and listening intently to her song, was a sturdy little *mousko*, not more than six years old, dressed already like a miniature ricksha man, in twisted loin-cloth and tiny plaited sandals. The old lady was Hosuke's grandmother, and the little boy was his son. He further told us, in his quaint broken English, that she was 'no muchee good' and 'muchee too old.'

The poor old thing looked timidly up at us as we entered; the sudden light dazed her, for her sunken eyes had a dim, far-off look in them as of one whose world lies in the past, peopled only by memories of dead hopes and departed friends. Then a sudden consciousness stole into them, and she bowed a low, graceful bow replete with all the measured dignity of the East.

Hosuke called his little son to him and showed us his tiny muscles, already firm with many a long day of scrambling on the rough hill roads in the keen mountain air. He pretended that they were nothing, not worthy of our notice, but he pretended very badly, the honest fellow, and we could see by his happy smile that not a curve in the little legs, not a half-formed muscle in the childish body, but went straight to his heart—aye, and lightened the long day in the shafts with thoughts of the home-coming and the dear wee voice waiting to welcome him in the gathering twilight.

I noticed, however, that when we began to talk of other things the little *mousko* slipped away to the old woman's side, and coaxed her to go on with the story. She did not comply at once; perhaps our presence disturbed her, or perhaps the dreamland threads, once dropped, could not be taken up so quickly. But her impatient auditor gave her no peace, and soon the weird falsetto began again. When we left the story was in full swing, and both old woman and little boy had entirely forgotten us.

I wonder what the story was about? I would like to have been that little *mousko*, with his serious face and fascinated eyes, for just ten minutes; to have sat by the old lady's side, and peeped with her into other days, while the memories came thick and fast, whispering in the wavering voice like withered leaves eddying hither and thither in the winter's wind.

No doubt she told him many a Japanese fairy-tale, many a dear little story which he would never forget, and which in after-life he will always associate with the old, old woman, with the little charcoal stove, and with the dark inner room. And then, perhaps, some day, when even his grandson thinks him 'too muchee old,' there may be some tiny *mousko* to find him out and lead him gently away to story-land, where love and laughter are waiting to welcome him, as in the sunny days of childhood long, long ago.

It was a delightful morning. The sunshine was brilliant, the air was crisp and fresh, and all Nature was out-of-doors enjoying the brightness and exhilaration of autumn.

Shortly after we had lost sight of Mitake, a long ascent had to be made on foot, the rickshas toiling slowly upward in our rear. The scenery was mountainous, but soft and beautiful. The undulating hills were carpeted with a tangle of delicate grasses, their hollows 'brimful with the shadow of blue flowers.' The breeze passed over them in long shivers, every little belfry bending its head gracefully with the whisper of an almost inaudible chime.

Away to our left we obtained glimpses of the open country chequered with sunshine and shadow. The ripple of a dancing brook greeted us joyously as it bounded down the hillside and sped laughingly away, concealed by the undergrowth of ferns which arched their fronds over the narrow water-bed. The insect world was all astir; the clear air was alive with coloured life, and merry with the motion of tiny wings. Large many-hued butterflies floated hither and thither like 'golden boats in a sunny sea'; flashing dragon-flies skimmed past, the invisible vibrations of their transparent wings catching the light and shimmering faintly in a haze of purple and silver; winged beetles and scarlet ladybirds darted to and fro; drowsy bumble-bees hummed from flower to flower—clumsy fellows! for ever

missing their foothold on some petal-edge, when they would roll into the scented shadows and lie grumbling lazily, their hairy thighs all dusty with pollen.

It was harvest-time. The men were all busy gleaning the golden rice-crops from the fields, and hanging the full sheaves on cross-stakes of bamboo to dry in the sun.

The women and girls, too, had their share in the labour that supplied the family with rice for the coming year, and before every cottage door they were engaged in tearing off the heavy ears from the stalks with iron rakes, then sifting the grain on mats spread on the warm southern side of the dwellings.

Towards afternoon we stopped at the hamlet of Nakatsugawa. The road had been heavy, the hills in many places being steep and full of ruts. Our coolies told us that they would go no farther. An argument with a Japanese ricksha man is as never-ending as a Scotch sermon; there is always a 'seventhly and lastly' lying in wait to disappoint you. In a recent book of travel I was struck by a sentence which recalled my experiences with Japanese coolies. The writer wished to cross a boundary in opposition to the powers that were. *Apropos* of the altercation which ensued, he quaintly says: 'I stayed there arguing with them for three weeks!'

The sun had set before we came to any decision.

Its last rays fell aslant the hill-tops, on the rough mountain road, the four stolid coolies, the entire population of Nakatsugawa, and our indignant selves.

'Offer them more pay,' I suggested weakly, British eloquence versus coolie obstinacy appearing to me like waves breaking on some iron rock.

'Say you no pay at all,' whispered Karakamoko.

'Ace of trumps,' applauded Kingston.

And so it proved. Hosuke had been wavering visibly; the last threat decided him.

'Can do,' he exclaimed suddenly.

The other coolies gave in, not without many grumbles, and away we drove into the gathering dusk.

Travelling by night on these steep hill roads is decidedly dangerous. Creeping downhill is a nervous experience. The way the coolies fling themselves back against the bodies of the little carriages till their broad shoulders are nearly on a level with the travellers' feet is alarming to the tyro at ricksha gymnastics. A larger stone than usual, a slip, a stumble, and the tragedy of 'Jack and Jill' would be enacted with a running ricksha accompaniment. It was very weird. The darkness hemmed one round with almost tangible obscurity, for the dim light from our paper lanterns but served to make night visible. It was impossible

to see more than a yard ahead. The road at times appeared to go down, down, like a shaft sunk into the solid gloom. Fantastic shapes loomed through the night, assuming monstrous, unheard-of proportions, with a strange antagonism in their contortions, then vanished suddenly, swallowed up in mist. The long-lost hereditary belief in witches comes back to us sometimes when confronted with the weird, magic-lantern effects of shadow-land. Voices were hushed, and conversation died away, each one being taken up with his own thoughts and with a silent observation of the mysterious phantasmagoria around. Once the low crooning song of some singer returning home after the day's labour in the rice-fields came faintly to us, softened and saddened by the distance. The village of Ochiai was not far off. It dawned on us suddenly, heralded by an unexpected chorus of children's voices, a shrill cry of wonderment raised at the unlooked-for excitement of our arrival.

To sup or not to sup? that was the question. Karakamoko had been sent to spy out the land. We three sat on the matting of the guest-room, hungrily, anxiously, waiting for the verdict. Sounds of voices came from the tiny garden underneath our windows. Were they discussing our menu? If so, it must be amusing, for laughter played a principal part in its arrangement.

All at once our guide, philosopher, and friend burst in upon us. We scanned her cheerful face, then felt happy; there was supper in her eye.

'What will eat?' she asked.

'What have got?' answered we with Oriental brevity.

This puzzled her. She had expected us to name a variety of dishes, and after every one she would have shaken her head and murmured, 'No can do'; but this bald, bare question, this masculine brutality, confused her.

'No likee Japanee chow?' she asked, looking from one to the other.

'Not very much,' I answered cautiously.

'Ah!' and she relapsed into silence.

Something unusual was happening under her wonderful coils of hair. Could it be an idea? We waited patiently.

At last it overflowed in three welcome words:

'Me thinkee hen.'

When she saw our faces she laughed joyously. It was a very bright idea.

'What age?' asked Kingston.

'Me thinkee chick.'

Spring chickens in autumn! This was indeed a luxury. Our mouths watered as our imagination stripped the tender young bones and revelled in the succulent meat. We had almost forgotten the existence of such gentle creatures as spring chickens.

'Bravo, Caricature!' shouted Kingston. 'You *are* a brick! But I say, old girl, how can catch, eh?'

Karakamoko considered a moment, then replied gravely:

'No can catchee, no can cook; no can cook, no can eat.'

This sounded Socratic, so we cheered her on her mission, and away she went highly delighted with our praise. She took our one lamp with her, so we sat still in patience and darkness to await her return.

Has the reader ever listened to the remonstrances of a spring chicken pursued by a Japanese maiden? They would draw tears from a heart of stone. Nothing but the consciousness of the 'long-felt want' which that chicken would so appropriately fill prevented our interfering on its behalf. Truly, our appetites are sad blunters of our finer sensibilities. Given a hunger of sufficient intensity, I honestly believe a man would not scruple to eat his grandmother. He would chew her tenderly out of regard for her sex, and possibly might even go the length of overlooking her toughness on the ground of relationship.

The chase was long—so long, in fact, that we wondered much at the indefatigable energy displayed by such youthful drumsticks. They betrayed a stamina, a fund of resource, beyond the hoped-for tenderness of their years. There came a time, however, when even their wonderful activity ex-

hausted itself, and a long chortle of poultry anguish announced the glad tidings that the race was over.

Gravely we inspected the vanquished. It was small and villainous-looking. Emaciation had marked it for her own. With a view to ascertaining its age and condition, we prodded it with discriminating forefingers. It resented the familiarity. If ever eye conveyed a curse, it was the eye of that hen.

'Is this your idea of a chicken, Karakamoko?' asked Gordon sadly.

'Can run muchee queek,' panted poor Karakamoko with characteristic irrelevancy.

With feelings of foreboding we sentenced it to death. While it was being cooked, Gordon passed the time in sharpening his pocket-knife (which stood us in lieu of a carver). The action was prophetic. I will draw a veil over that dinner. It is a painful memory even now. The curse seen in the eye of that hen returned to haunt me in the shape of the fiend of indigestion. To be hen-haunted at midnight is a fearsome thing; it is almost as unpleasant as being henpecked at that hour. Still, one thing consoles me: I have not suffered in vain if my experience can prove a warning to others. Beware (these are my last words on this subject), O ye who follow in the paths of Japanese travel—beware of spring chickens in autumn!

CHAPTER XXIV

BY THE MAGOME PASS TO AGEMATSU

'TEARS, idle tears.' Kingston knew not what they meant, so he rushed downstairs to ask our advice.

We were taken aback.

'Do you think we ought to go and see?' I asked Gordon.

'I don't know,' he answered dubiously.

'Come along!' called Kingston; 'there won't be much left of her if you don't make haste.'

'Is she in pain?' I asked, as we followed him indoors.

'It looks like it.'

'Physical pain?'

'No; more like painful physic,' he chuckled.

'What do you mean?'

'What I say. I'm sure she has been experimenting. You remember the other day, when she tried those salts, and they all fizzed up in her inside? Well, this time it may be ink, or shaving-soap, or boot-grease!'

We found Karakamoko sitting on the pink table-cloth, indulging in what girls call 'a good cry.'

I think she must have heard us coming, for the storm reached its height as we entered the room. Her tiny hands nearly covered her face, and through the little fingers the tears chased each other down the rosy cheeks. She was such a sunny little person, with a nature which belonged so entirely to the merry side of life, that to find her crying was as unexpected as it was embarrassing. It was like trusting a day whose blue skies advise you to leave your umbrella at home, and then do their best to drown you. Metaphorically speaking, we threw away our umbrellas when first we saw Karakamoko smile.

We stood round her in dismay. We looked at her, and then into each other's faces, where we read nothing but utter helplessness and consternation. No one spoke. She sobbed steadily. I think three men confronted unexpectedly with one little girl's tears is a pitiable sight. She was such a dainty piece of Japanese bric-à-brac, that we all felt painfully out of place. We were as capable of understanding the sorrows of a humming-bird, as these sudden tears of our little guide. There seemed to be something too dainty in this quaint outburst to be quite human; and yet, I suppose, a real woman's heart throbbed beneath that pretty dress, folded so neatly over the heaving bosom.

'Can't you say something?' whispered Gordon to me.

'Why don't you speak to her?' I said to Kingston, nudging him severely with my elbow.

'Oh, I like that!' he retorted. 'Say something yourself.'

It was very awkward. We all longed to slip away, but no one liked to be the first to retreat.

Karakamoko felt the advantage of the situation, and, womanlike, made full use of it. We might have been chairs, for all the notice she took of us.

This was idiotic. Something had to be done. Someone must begin.

Taking the bull by the horns, I said desperately: 'Karakamoko!' A world of tender remonstrance throbbed along the three *k's* of that ridiculous name.

No answer.

'Karakamoko *dear!*'—in tones of deep affection.

Renewed sobs.

'Karakamoko *dearest!*'—in an accent of surpassing love.

Perfect deluge!

'No use,' burst out Kingston; 'you're no good. Let me have a try.'

'Oh, go on please—never mind me!' I said sadly, for it is an unpleasant sensation to find one's love unreturned, and I was unused to it in those youthful days.

'Now, lookee here,' Kingston began—'lookee here, young Caricature San? What for cry? Muchee too plenty tear have got. Ugly face will make.'

Why this nonsensical jargon should be more effective than my loving words I leave the reader to decide. The effect of his speech, however, was certainly remarkable. The last sentence, in particular, had a wonderfully cooling effect. Still, the storm was not over, and when she could speak she sobbed out :

'Ha! boo—hoo—me pl-enty sad g-i-r-l' (sob, sob). 'You no likee me' (sob). 'What for once was baby?' (sob, sob, sob).

Poor little woman! She was evidently very unhappy, so Kingston said kindly :

'We all like you, old girl; perhaps you don't like us?'

'Me love you all'—nodding her head vehemently, but adding in a sad voice: 'You think pay yen makee all right. Japanese girl no inside have got.'

'What did I tell you?' whispered Kingston triumphantly. 'It must be shaving-soap, after all.'

'Nonsense!' exclaimed Gordon. 'She means her feelings; someone has hurt them.'

'What a brute!' we both ejaculated.

'Who is it, Karakamoko?' I asked sympathetically.

'Gordon Sama,' she said tremulously.

This was astonishing; we could hardly believe our ears.

'What did I do?' asked Gordon incredulously.

'You speakee unkind; you say me belong plenty bad thing.'

'When did I say that?'

'Last night. You speakee—me hear you say you no likee Caricature. Plenty bad thing, Caricature!'

We tried not to laugh. That Gordon's ideas on art should have rebounded on poor little Karakamoko seemed very droll. We recalled the lamplit room, the miserable supper, the discontented discussion, which finally called forth a fierce tirade against bad art in general and caricature in particular, and we smiled again. These paper walls were very thin: Karakamoko had overheard.

It took us two and a half hours to climb the Magome Pass that morning, at the foot of which nestled the village of Ochiai. The view from the top of the pass was magnificent. Along the mountain-tops the mists quivered and clung. They twined themselves in wreaths round the bold outlines, and lay—a shimmering veil—along the dark sides in long, level lines of vapour. They were never still a moment. Sometimes they mustered their forces and blotted everything out, and again they melted as if by magic, and allowed the distance to loom dimly through; they coquetted with the weather-beaten heights, touching them with white mist-fingers, lightly, airily, in a parting caress as they receded; and all at once, with an inexplicable

suddenness, they veered round, and, sweeping back, they flooded mountain and valley with the cool envelopment of their embraces.

The lower slopes, clad in a green garment of many-tinted foliage, swept down to the purple of the valleys, while in the distance, glowing with the warmth of noon-day, stretched the fertile province of Mino.

On the other side of the pass the uplands rose gently from the sheen of the river, which wound between its verdant banks till it disappeared, a mere thread of light, on the horizon.

The descent was long and tedious. Several mountain ponies were passed — poor miserable animals — hobbling painfully up the stone-strewn road, urged on with many a resounding blow from the sticks which their peasant masters wielded so cruelly.

Before we gained the river level once again, we passed through a bamboo grove. I do not know if the reader has seen a bamboo forest ; if not, it is certainly a treat to come. To me it is one of the loveliest things in all the lovely world of Nature.

The slender stems, with a polish as of immense age upon them, shot aloft, with never a branch to break their measured stateliness. The eye followed the knots in the cane shafts, as they recurred at regular intervals, till they vanished in the canopy of foliage which shut out the blue. Infinite multitudes

of these dainty pillars, like the aërial columns of some enchanted cathedral, receded away in endless succession, farther and farther into the distance. The light, toned to the faintest emerald, fell from interwoven leaf and intertwisted branch. The cool, clear, pellucid green lent an almost unearthly light to the lonely wood. There was a solemnity in this mellow illumination that was restful to eye and brain, a serenity as of voluntary retirement and seclusion from the outer world, the subtle sense of which, with the coyness usual to the beautiful, had but visted us now and again at rare intervals in the land of dreams.

Here and there the canopy was pierced by a ray of sunlight which sped downwards, splashing leaf and stem with flakes of gold, or a break aloft allowed the little intruders to run riot, and dance in sunbeam revels on the brown of the forest floor. It was very still in that pale-green world; the very air was drowsy, and slept among the fretted stems, dreaming perchance of bygone summers, deceived for a while by the calm which reigned over all.

As I think of it now, a beautiful verse by a modern poet sings in my memory. It is so appropriate that I cannot refrain from quoting it:

> 'A temple whose transepts are measured by miles,
> Whose chancel has morning for priest,
> Whose floorwork the foot of no spoiler defiles,
> Whose musical silence no music beguiles,
> No festivals limit its feast.'

'Isn't that glorious?' exclaimed Gordon.

We stood still, spellbound.

The light that lay on the woodlands was not mere sunlight: it was flame. The air was luminous beyond words. Was the foliage on fire? Had a vast conflagration burst out among this sea of sinking and swelling tree-tops, these waves of leafage innumerable? Here and there a pyramid of flame, now wan red, now bright yellow, shone resplendent, flinging a tremulous reflection of tender rose or delicate saffron over its nearer neighbours; but for the most part the trees waited in sacrificial robes of various green for the fiery splendours, the funeral obsequies of the waning year.

We were standing on a narrow path cut out of the face of the mountain-side, with a precipice above, where the sky-line shone, and a precipice below, where the river sang; and all around us, as I have said, was encamped an army of trees, stately, silent, motionless, with a premature twilight purpling their mossy stems, and the wonders of the sunlight gilding their radiant heads.

It was a foolhardy road, that little mountain path, and seemed to delight in tempting Providence with a juvenile indifference to the many dangers it was provoking. At times it would climb upwards breathlessly, hand over hand, as it were, skirting the shelving rock, clinging to rafters driven home amidst the tangled tree-roots, balancing itself on the

dizzy edge, and all for the love of being thought romantic, and perhaps for the sake, too, of the limpid air and the distant peeps of sunlit scenery. Then, growing weary of adventures in mid-air, it would spring down to the cool shadows at a break-neck pace, which tried one's nerves sadly. Once or twice it even crossed the river, but warily, resting now and then on dripping boulders embedded in mid-stream, trembling the while in sheer excitement as it felt the turmoil of waters seething around it.

'Now then, Caricature, out you get!'

Karakamoko looked at the hill, then eyed her ricksha man's calves. Elementary arithmetic was evidently in possession of her funny little head. Hills were a sad trial to Karakamoko. As a rule, she tried to ignore them, and on the indiscreet approach of one of these natural mistakes she would pretend to be entirely taken up with her pink bundle, or her little prayer-book, or some other quite irrelevant object. Kingston, however, was not to be deceived in this naïve Japanese way. On this occasion the hill was very steep.

'Out you get!' he shouted.

'Thinkee can drive.'

'Think of your poor ricksha man. You'd better walk; we are all walking.'

'Plenty strong ricksha man; thinkee can do!'

'But you're plenty fat girl.'

'Ha!' and with this heart-rending sigh Karakamoko launched herself out of her little carriage and took to the road.

These ricksha men were jolly fellows; laughter and song came to them naturally, and they would joke among themselves, as they toiled onwards, with all the rollicking merriment of school-boys. If the sun shone they would laugh; if the rain fell they would laugh; if the way was long and weary they would laugh; if they were tired and hungry still would they laugh with that inexhaustible fund of good-humour which one meets with nowhere out of Japan. What an elixir of life such laughter must be! How it must lengthen one's days! How it must smooth out life's wrinkles with the enchantment of happiness, with the true philosopher's stone of inward content!

'Coo-e-e!' yelled Kingston.

The sonorous tones rang through the dusky street, they floated away on the night air, then returned to us faintly in mysterious reverberations from the cliffs behind.

'That ought to waken them,' he chuckled.

'Thinkee one big devil,' laughed Karakamoko.

'I wish they would make haste,' said I, shivering.

The long rows of paper panels were enshrouded in gloom. The little village of Agematsu lay swathed in mist, with the spell of the cheerless

autumn night creeping along its darkened streets. It looked strange and uncanny.

As we waited in the darkness, a dim light wavered behind the paper panes somewhere, far off, through, perhaps, long vistas of these semi-transparent barriers. It approached slowly. At length the panel door was pushed aside and an old man appeared, holding a rude lantern above his head.

Karakamoko and Gordon spoke to him, but he did not reply. For long he stood silent, eyeing us with evident suspicion—a strange, antagonistic figure barring the entrance. We were so accustomed to the cheery welcome of other hamlets, that this dumb hostility disheartened us ; it struck a discordant note in the merry roundelay played by hospitable Japan. Unexpected discourtesies are always those which affect one most disagreeably. At length he was prevailed upon to allow us to enter ; but as we followed him into the darkened dwelling the cold of our reception came in, too, intangible, invisible, but still very real, reminding us that, after all, we were but intruders in this wonderful land, but aliens adrift, with half the world between us and the little island we were privileged to call our home.

CHAPTER XXV

A BENIGHTED FOREST

'He! he! he!' rippled out musically in the gray light of the dawn. I opened my eyes sleepily, and wondered.

'He! he! he!' it came again. I try to write it, but how miserable is the failure! A quill stolen from little Cupid's wings and dipped in liquid laughter might possibly write a sound like that, but I doubt it. Cupid himself could not copy it, unless, indeed, he were to go to Karakamoko for the receipt. What was she doing? Ah! now I saw: she was leaning out of the open window, her back was turned to me, and I could see her plump shoulders shaking with merriment.

'What are you laughing at?' I called out.

'Plenty funny man!' she giggled without turning round.

'Who is he?'

'Oh! b'long all same village. He! he!'

'What is he saying?'

But she paid no attention to this. Her new acquaintance was evidently most entertaining.

'Do come here!' I shouted at last. 'Come and attend to me, if you can tear yourself away from—— Hullo! where did you get that flower?'

It was a large yellow chrysanthemum with perfect petals. With the delicate artistic perception of her race, and perhaps also of her sex, she had stuck it into her luxuriant black hair, just in the one place where the pale gold of the blossom was needed to relieve the glossy background of her fantastic coiffure.

'Funny man did give; you thinkee nice?'

'H-m-m!'

'Eh? What thinkee?'

'Oh well, I think it's another "flutteration."'

'He! he! he!'

It turned out a hopelessly wet day. The leaden sky seemed to have fallen over the village of Agematsu, and lay in dense mist among the black-tiled cottages. The hills behind were completely blotted out.

We felt depressed. Karakamoko proved this general rule by being the exception, but, then, she seemed made on purpose to prove rules in that eccentric manner. Breakfast promised to be too meagre to raise our mental weather-glass. All at once the sun shone out: the luminary referred to presided not over the heavens, but over — well, over that region by which some cynics, presumably

feminine, believe that the affections of men are to be approached. Gordon said :

'I have a surprise for you fellows, and, as it is a bad day, I think we deserve a little treat.'

'What is it?'

'A tin of ox-tongue.'

I think the old floor must have sympathized with the enthusiastic breakdown which greeted this announcement, for, according to the indignant landlord, a considerable portion of it followed our example !

'Have you a tin-opener?' I asked.

'Of course I have—an American one, warranted to open tins without assistance.'

'Hullo, Karakamoko!' I exclaimed, 'what's the matter?'

We looked at our little guide. She had turned very red, and was trying to conceal her confusion by attempting to pack Gordon's bath-sponge in my soap-box.

'No-o can eat box-meat t-to—d-day,' she stammered.

'Why not?'

'No will taste nice.'

'Indeed! Have you been trying it?'

'Come along, let us know the worst,' cried Kingston desperately. 'Where did you say it was?'

'In my trunk, left side, under the books.'

Karakamoko was very ill at ease.

'By Jove!' shouted Kingston, 'what's this?' and he drew out a mysterious something from the bottom of the trunk—something, alas! which resembled a tin of tongue no longer; something which was only a mass of metal and meat, battered to a condition which would have made the ox weep if he could but have seen it.

We gazed at each other in despair. No one spoke. At last a tremulous voice was heard. It said:

'Me plenty bad girl! Wanchee see what inside! Velly sorry. Boo-hoo!'

Off again, on foot this time, Karakamoko and our luggage securing the only rickshas which the village could supply. Agematsu was soon left behind us in the mist. On we trudged in the steady rain. The gutters, swollen with the yellow wash of the hills, gurgled and gushed along, overflowing their banks and swamping the narrow path, till it was difficult to tell which was the gutter and which the road. Across the sky masses of cloud were drifting. The raindrops pattered down, but before they fell the fierce north wind would pounce upon them, and would weave them into a stinging whip wherewith to lash the woods and valleys with cries of inarticulate rage. The tall trees swayed to and fro with uneasy moans and sudden shivers, while far on the mist-interwoven air were whirled the many-tinted autumn leaves torn from the gnarled branches.

Not only had we the wind and the rain to fight against, but hill after hill rose before us and made walking doubly difficult. Occasionally a solitary peasant came into sight, trying to shelter himself under a dilapidated umbrella covered with thin oilskin paper, or the country postman would dash past at a long, swinging trot.

Few people were to be met, for the road was wild and unfrequented ; the only signs of habitation were an occasional hut or straggling village surrounded by its chequered patchwork of paddy-fields. The poorest cottage had pots of golden chrysanthemums and China asters arranged in front of the entrance.

At Fukashima—a quaint little village nestling under the brow of a hill—we managed to hire three more rickshas, after an immense amount of trouble, conversation, and patience.

The afternoon gradually improved, until shortly before sunset it was as fine as if these later hours were the close of a perfect day.

Leaving the mountain track, we took to a road which wound its serpentine way through dense forest-land. Our departure from Fukashima had been delayed by the ill-timed arguments of our new coolies. We should have left the village quite a couple of hours earlier, for before half the distance to Yadohara was accomplished darkness overtook us and we were benighted.

The air, pleasantly warm while the sun was still

above the horizon, all at once struck me as damp and cold, with a feeling of autumn and dead leaves.

It had been growing darker as we trotted on, imperceptibly so at first, but more rapidly afterwards as the twilight closed in upon us. I could scarcely make out the back of the ricksha in front, while even my own coolie became dim and indistinct as the outlines grew blurred in the waning light.

The little car bounded along, obedient to the muscular arms, the even trot being kept up steadily mile after mile. Swayed from side to side by the rapid motion, I leant back and gave myself up to the spirit of the scene.

A vapour rose from the ground, and lay—a misty sea—among the trees which overhung our path.

Dead leaves fluttered down : one struck me on the face ; its dampness made me shiver. Others fell lightly into the ricksha. They lay so thickly on the mossy path that all sound was deadened. So silently we went, we might have been a procession of phantoms revisiting our woodland haunts.

Around us lay deep shadows. Occasionally some tree whiter than its neighbours would loom dimly out of the darkness for a moment, then vanish, swallowed up in night. Above, the vault-like dome of foliage shut out the stars.

Even the coolies felt the influence of the gloomy region through which we were passing. Laugh and song died away. Once they stopped to consult

about the road, speaking in whispers, as if afraid to break the stillness around. All at once my coolie —we were the last of the line on this occasion— stumbled and nearly fell. I had been momentarily expecting it to happen, for by this time it was impossible to see a yard ahead.

A halt was called. The Chinese lanterns stowed away in the rickshas were sought for, lighted, and hung on the shafts; then on we went again.

Our lights now cast flickering and uncertain reflections across the path. We must have looked like a party of fire-flies to anyone who could have seen us from some distance off, as we shimmered through the forest.

I could just make out my coolie's back, and the outline of his sturdy neck bent to the work. In front Karakamoko's ricksha loomed out of a faint halo of light; before that, again, Kingston's could barely be seen through wreaths of mist; Gordon's was a very shadow's shadow, while that of the luggage coolie, who led the cavalcade, was quite indistinguishable, lost in the gloom ahead.

The bats, disturbed by our lights, flitted around us. Occasionally a pool had to be avoided, the men passing word along the line as to where it lay. A *détour* among the trees had to be made over an undergrowth of dwarf vegetation, broken branches, and sodden leaves. The pace was then reduced to a walk. I longed to get out, but my coolie would

not hear of it. I think he imagined that his dignity as a ricksha man was at stake.

A hoarse chorus, from the direction of the pool, told of the frogs who were watching us out of the darkness.

The little carriages swayed and bumped over the uneven ground ; I had to hold on tightly to prevent myself being thrown out. When we regained the path the steady trot was resumed.

How long it seemed since we had started from the village of Fukashima! I felt as if we had been travelling for days through this interminable forest. It seemed impossible to believe that this gloomy wilderness, this endless monotony, could ever look bright and cheerful, or that the sun ever visited this deserted path.

The idea that on there ahead, somewhere in the black night which hemmed us in, a welcome awaited us with light, and warmth, and smiles, was very pleasant.

Swayed by the motion and chilled by the cold, I fell into a fitful sleep—a light, uneasy slumber, with restless dreams in which realities were distorted, and imagination, left to wander fancy-free, played fantastic tricks with the tired brain.

At last, 'Yadohara! Yadohara!' came the cheerful cry from the foremost coolie, and far ahead, through the scattered trees, a twinkling light gleamed out of the darkness. The other coolies

plucked up heart. From a monotonous trot the pace accelerated to almost a race. A chorus was started. More lights flashed out. The village dogs barked loudly. The chorus degenerated into a series of war-whoops. Faster and faster we tore along, every coolie exerting his weary muscles to their utmost, and in a few moments more the dark forest was left behind us for ever.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE LITTLE SUFFERER

The mattresses had been pulled from out the dark recess under the staircase and laid side by side on the white matting. Karakamoko had left the room; the pleasures of her hot bath called her out through the dark courtyard into the lamp-lit bathing-house, and they never appealed in vain to her cleanly little person.

A knotty point had arisen among the laces of Kingston's shooting-boots; with right leg crossed over left knee, he was investigating the case with great attention. His gravity was judicial, but his language distinctly criminal.

Gordon, in his shirt-sleeves, was seated on one side of our solitary candle, trying to mend a tear in his coat; while I, on the other side, was writing the day's experiences in my pocket-book.

The bare little room looked barer than usual in the fitful light. Our luggage was always a godsend to us; without it we would have found it impossible to make ourselves comfortable during the long evenings in these Japanese tea-houses, for the paper

panels of the adjustable walls had a knack of giving way should the weary traveller be rash enough to lean against them.

The inmates of the tea-house had not yet gone to bed. A local fair had drawn many people to Yadohara, and this inn, being the only one of any size, was consequently overcrowded. We had found difficulty in persuading the good people to house us, and it was only upon our promising to occupy but one room, and to expect no attendance, that we ultimately succeeded in overcoming their objections.

Curious noises buzzed around us. They made me feel as if I were imprisoned in a human hive—a tiny transparent chamber surrounded on all sides by the workaday hum of bees. There is no privacy in a Japanese tea-house. One can shut one's self up in a little square which is dignified by the name of 'room'; one can draw the panelled walls till they meet on the grooves, but even then one hears every whisper, almost every pin-fall that takes place in any part of the house, as distinctly as if it were but a yard away.

Many sounds reached us that evening; our neighbours indulged in animated conversation, not only from one room to another, but through whole suites of paper apartments. Tap, tap, tap, came the familiar sound from tiny pipes, as the smokers rapped out the ashes. A few cats created an excitement among the tiles out in the darkness—

a frenzied burst of revelry with a chorus which sounded as though hot coals were being dropped into cold water. Bursts of girlish laughter, mingled with the faint *frou-frou* of soft rustlings, came to the ear, and now and again we heard the long-drawn snore of some traveller, tired, perchance, with his day of unwonted excitement among the delights of the village fair.

Gordon yawned, stretched himself, threw his coat in one corner and his boots after it, stuck the needle in his cap, undressed, then got into bed. Kingston and I followed his example. A hush seemed to have fallen over the house; the noises around us had all but died away.

One side of the little room opened on to a miniature passage, from which it was separated only by the usual paper panels. Occasionally someone would come along this passage holding a light, and would cast a shadow on our paper wall. It had a curious effect. When it was a girl, we heard only the light footfall of her stocking soles, so faint that it was almost inaudible; then a shadow would glide from the extreme end of the wall—such an impossible shadow, made up of such grotesque exaggerations, that we lay and laughed at them from underneath the bed-clothes out of the darkened, sleep-expectant room.

All at once Gordon started.

'What's that?' he exclaimed.

'What?' mumbled Kingston sleepily.

'That noise. Listen; yes, there it is again.'

We held our breath. From out of the surrounding darkness the sound of someone moaning came faintly to us, broken every now and then by a peevish cry, as of a creature in pain. Now that the house was almost silent, this sound could be distinctly heard above the whispers of the few inmates who still remained awake.

'Someone must be ill,' whispered Kingston.

'Yes,' I assented. 'Here comes Karakamoko; we will ask her.'

The shadow of our little guide was thrown on the paper panels as I spoke, and a moment later she came into the room.

'Me muchee late?' she asked anxiously. Then, as she saw no cause for alarm, 'Plenty people bath have had. What for long face have got?'

'H-s-h-h! Listen: who is that moaning?'

'Ha, me know! Him b'long one piecee *mousmé*. Plenty sick; no go near; you catchee sick.'

'What is the matter with her?' asked Gordon.

'Too muchee hot.'

'Ah, fever! Is there no doctor?'

'No, plenty poor; say muchee pray; b'long all same; Binzuru hear'; and Karakamoko clapped her little hands and bowed low to show how it was done.

Gordon scrambled out of bed.

'Now, then, Karakamoko,' he said, 'where is the black bag?'

'What do you want it for?' I asked, passing it to him.

'Your quinine.'

'All right; it's in a white bottle wrapped in a sock. Got it?'

'Yes; good-night, you fellows! Lead the way, Karakamoko;' and, pushing aside the panel, their two figures disappeared down the passage.

Curiosity, however, and perhaps also a feeling of interest in, and sympathy for, the sufferer moaning so plaintively out of the darkness, were too strong for me. The receding steps died away; it was very quiet. I looked at Kingston. He had pulled his plaid over him, and was already nearly asleep. Slipping out of bed, I drew on some clothes, and, opening the panel door, was soon on their track. It was by no means an easy task. I imagined that I had mastered the geography of the old house during the preliminary inspection under the guidance of the landlord, but I found that personally conducted parties are not conducive to thoroughness. From all sides came the sound of breathing. Along the narrow passage I felt my way cautiously. Gordon's voice guided me to a long, low-roofed room. A chorus of snores greeted me as I entered.

Karakamoko's candle shed a flickering light over

a group of men, women, and children, stretched in the abandonment of sleep. They lay all round the room in almost every posture, their limbs flung into careless attitudes suggestive of the last lazy movements before sleep fell on the weary eyelids. The heads of the women were supported by wooden frameworks similar to the one used by Karakamoko. Here and there the light caught a face—upturned and expressionless, with half-opened mouth—standing out in weird and unnatural relief from dense masses of shadow; or it danced upon some apparently distorted form, huddled up, motionless, with dark, tangled hair half buried in the outstretched arms. One old woman in a corner was awake; her eyes watched us furtively with malevolence sad to see in one so old. She was smoking, and the inevitable tap, tap, of her tiny pipe broke through the steady monotony of snores with an almost startling effect. The atmosphere engendered by the many sleepers was not altogether unpleasant, for it was very faint—a strange, subtle atmosphere, seemingly composed of musk perfumed with incense, having a far-off quality vaguely awe-inspiring on account of the memories it stirred into life. Under its influence one forgot the cause in the effect. It gave me the uncanny sensation which often affects Europeans when brought into personal contact with the teeming populations of the East. This feeling is almost inexplicable; its roots lie

deep in antiquity, clinging, doubtless, to the soil of hereditary repugnance with that tenacity which characterizes all feelings of slow and steady growth. The immemorial superstitions; the mysterious and elaborate religions; the wonderful social institutions which owe their perfect polish and ceremonious etiquette to the vast antiquity of ancient race, receding as it does far into the dim twilight of the world's history; the myriads of yellow faces, impassive or scowling as in China, humorous or grotesque as in Japan, passing one by like infinite waves tossed up by the endless centuries; the alienation; the loneliness; the utter want of sympathy, and the almost repulsive feeling of horrible fascination, impress the mind strongly, and affect the traveller with sensations deeper, perhaps, than he can analyze.

I had not much time to take in the surroundings, for all my interest was centred in the little group gathered round the sick *mousmé*. The father and mother—common types of the lower orders of Japanese peasantry—were kneeling by the bedside. They had been praying to Binzuru, as Karakamoko had told us; but now that this Englishman had come to help them, their whole souls turned to him with a naïve confidence and childlike trust that was pathetic to witness. It was, after all, only the sure indication of that confidence in superior knowledge which we all have felt in times of sudden, inexplicable sick-

ness, when the watcher's soul yearns with a terrible yearning for the first spark of hope kindled in the physician's kindly face.

They followed his every movement with awe-struck interest, not daring to speak except when asked a question, and even then they answered only in whispered monosyllables.

Karakamoko, standing at the foot of the bed, was holding the candle so that the light fell upon the little sufferer. Gordon was bending over the heap of miscellaneous rags and tatters which formed the miserable apology for a bed; his back was turned to me.

The central object of the group was the sick girl; she appeared to be about six years old. Such a winsome little face, with a pathetic wistfulness in it that made my heart ache at Nature's seeming cruelty in visiting her with undeserved pain. She was very flushed, and her eyes sparkled with unnatural brightness. Her black hair was coiled in the same wonderful manner as that of her elders. Her tossing, however, had dishevelled it, for one tress had wandered down to the little neck, round which it curled lovingly.

She had ceased to moan when first I saw her, and was lying still, looking at Gordon. His was a nature which instinctively attracted little children; they seemed to feel at once that he was good and that he loved them.

I approached the group on tip-toe. Karakamoko gave me a smile ; no one else saw me.

Tap, tap, tap, came from the corner of the room ; the old woman was preparing to fill herself another pipe. The deep breathing of the sleepers rose from the floor. One of them moaned now and then, lost in the 'anarchy of dreams.' Otherwise the old house was very quiet. I touched Gordon on the shoulder, and whispered :

'How is she ?'

He started. 'You here !' he said. 'She is not very ill. I wish I could take her temperature, but I've nothing to take it with.'

'Have you given her anything ?' I asked.

'Only quinine ; it will stop the fever, I hope, for it has not much hold yet.'

He bent over her again, and touched the little hand concealed under the bed-clothes. An anxious look came into her face—an expression of childish doubt. She had trusted him much, she already loved him ; but was he quite worthy of supreme confidence ? The uncertainty was short-lived. The kind face bending over her banished every fear. With a bashful air she drew something from beneath the covering—something which was black, and which she handled tenderly, then held it up to him, timidly, for inspection. It was a rag doll. I could see a longing for sympathy in the feverish eyes. Gordon bent still lower, and whispered in her ear. I do not

know what he said, but it was doubtless a word of sympathy, for she drew a long breath of happiness, and her little hand closed over one of his fingers.

'Can I help you in any way?' I whispered.

'It's all right, old chap,' he said. 'I'll manage alone. Get along to bed, both of you. It's all right, really,' he added kindly, as I hesitated, uncertain whether to take him at his word or not. 'I promise to call you if I require you.'

He was evidently in earnest, so, leaving the candle with him, we groped our way back to our room in the dark.

It must have been very early when I awoke with a start from the restless sleep into which I had fallen. Within our room the imperfect light dimly showed the outlines, blurred and faint, of the paper walls, the open boxes, the mattress beds, and the muffled figures of Karakamoko and Kingston, still fast asleep.

Raising myself on my elbow, I glanced at Gordon's bed, which lay behind me. It was empty. Where was he? I made an effort to collect my thoughts—then I remembered. He had had no sleep. He must have been taking care of the little sick girl all night. Perhaps she was worse. I must go and see. I shivered; it was very cold. Stepping noiselessly to the window, I pulled the panel aside and looked out.

The October day was just breaking. The street

below was lifeless and deserted. It looked sad and cheerless, the deep shadows still massed under the eaves. A rude cart was standing on one side of the road; one shaft had been broken and roughly spliced again by its peasant owner. The black tiles of the houses were all frosted with silver; it must have frozen hard before the dawn.

Everything else—the winding road, the valley with its noisy river, the wooded hills which shut us in—all were lost in mist. It lingered in the silent street, flitting lightly over roof and chimney, pausing awhile to peep in at the open windows, and stealing away noiselessly like some mist-maiden with silvery veil and thin, diaphanous draperies. Shivering again, I closed the panel softly, and, slipping on some clothes, I stole along the dimly-lighted passage on tiptoe.

The room affected me even more disagreeably than it had done on the previous evening. The general untidiness, the muffled figures, had not changed, but the atmosphere had become nauseating in spite of the fact that Gordon had opened a panel of one of the windows, and in the crude gray light it gave me a shuddering sensation of aversion. This little world of human beings compared so unfavourably with the peep I had had into the world of Nature which lay beyond: here all was stifled, confined, heavy with strange odours which oppressed the senses with the weight of unimaginable antiquity;

there the dewy freshness of early morning glittered in the air, the first faint movements of the dawn, before it stirred the slumbers of Nature's children—of sleeping bird and folded petal.

The old woman who had been smoking during my previous visit had fallen asleep, as had also the parents of the little girl. Gordon was still there. His coat was off, and I saw that it was tucked round his little patient. Her tiny hand was still grasping his—just as I had seen it last—but she had dropped off into a deep, natural sleep.

Gordon looked up as I crossed the room.

'She is all right now,' he said cheerfully.

'Do you mean to say that you have sat in that position all night?' I asked.

'Part of the time; she would not have slept without it,' he answered. 'Ah yes! my coat? I know it is rather thin for her, but my arm has helped to keep her warm.'

CHAPTER XXVII

BY SAKURAZAWA TO SHIMO-NO-SUWA

Off again by eight o'clock. We were all obliged to walk, for the Torii Pass had to be climbed, and no rickshas could drag us up the steep serpentine road which lay between us and the distant summit.

In spite of the difficulty of the ascent, it was delightful to find one's self getting higher and higher, to feel that every upward step helped to unroll the wide panorama below ; to pause every now and then to pant for breath, and to cast a backward glance away down the hazy valley to where the little village of Yadohara still slept in its setting of faint blue smoke.

The mountain road was strewn with worn-out straw sandals flung aside by the peasants and left to rot in rain and sunshine.

At Myegawa we stopped awhile and rested on the roadside to allow our rickshas and Karakamoko to overtake us.

Soon we saw the five ricksha men coming round a turn of the road. In a short time they joined us, and squatted in a row under a hedge to enjoy a well-earned smoke.

'I wonder where Karakamoko is,' I remarked to Kingston, as no sign of our little guide was to be seen.

'Suppose you ask them,' he suggested.

I looked round for Gordon — our very present help in time of linguistic trouble—but he had disappeared with his sketch-book in search of the picturesque. I was thrown on my own conversational resources—a lee shore to such a rudderless ship as I felt myself to be. I looked at the five: they smiled encouragement. This filled me with hope, and I addressed them in a series of inarticulate but cheerful sounds, gesticulating the while in the direction of the hills. The smile grew broader. Again I returned to the charge, and again I called upon the mountains to witness to the sincerity of my thirst for knowledge. The smile expanded visibly, became audible, bubbled over, and—well, there is no use denying it, self-deception was no longer possible —the five shook with laughter.

'I can't make them understand,' I said sadly.

'Pooh!' ejaculated Kingston. 'Don't chuck up the sponge so easily; give 'em another round. No? Well, then, I'll tackle them.'

And he did, but it was not Japanese; it seemed to be a painful language to speak correctly, and Kingston owned afterwards that it made his arms ache. He had, however, in his oration, with more cleverness than I was master of, harped ceaselessly upon the sweet name of Karakamoko. This to our

coolies' minds was as the lighting of a lamp in a dark night. So constant a repetition, they argued, betrayed a more than usual interest in that lady's movements. They were able to gratify it. One of the five constituted himself spokesman, and rose to reply. He was a consummate actor. He enacted a series of scenes illustrative of Karakamoko's life during the past hour and a half. He personated her in many attitudes—in waddling up hill, in gasping for breath, in freely using her European handkerchief, in annoyance, in grief, in despair.

The climax was reached when, snatching an article of clothing from a young woman whose curiosity in these unusual proceedings had prompted her to draw near, he lay down in the midst of the road, and, wrapping his head and shoulders in the borrowed garment, gave vent to loud groans of exhaustion. Those private theatricals were received with much applause. The only serious person present was the young woman, who made ceaseless attempts to recover her property; its loss placed her in a position which must have been extremely trying to her modesty.

In the midst of these pleasantries the object of our inquiries appeared in the distance. She had taken off her shoes, and was hobbling painfully along the stone-strewn road in her stocking soles. A very sorrowful Karakamoko she looked, and our hearts filled with pity.

'Hard work, old girl?' shouted Kingston when she came within earshot.

'Me plenty tired,' she gasped.

'I'm afraid we went too fast for you,' said I.

'Ha, yes! plenty too queek: short legs have got —no can do.'

There was an unusual treat in store for us at the village of Sakurazawa—the landlord of the solitary tea-house spoke English. That was not all—he had imbibed Western notions and customs to a quite alarming extent. Why such an exotic flower of European culture wasted his sweetness in the desert air of Sakurazawa we could not imagine. Greeting us with a wonderful hotel smile, he held out a little yellow 'fist,' and suggested frankly: 'Shake of hand?'

It was a long time since we had shaken hands, but we had not forgotten the accomplishment.

'You shake well,' remarked our new friend pleasantly, under the impression that he was paying us a great compliment. 'Me talkee English—Englishmans have seen. You likee Japan? You go ricksha? Good. Walking too far of legs does fatigue. Shake of hand?'

We again shook hands.

'I shake English fashion,' he explained proudly.

'We recognised it at once,' said we.

'You thinkee I talk well? Are surprised?' was

his next remark. Being assured of our astonishment, he babbled on cheerfully: 'Yes, yes, I know the English; I wear the trousers; I am glad to see Englishmans. Shall we shake the hand?'

We shook hands warmly. He was delightfully refreshing, but he had no idea of the significance of hand-shaking. To him it was evidently a mysterious rite, a form of propitiation—a manual means of ingratiating himself with 'Englishmans.' He scorned the idea of limiting himself to a meeting and a parting shake. He was determined to shake, and shake, and shake, until he had finally shaken himself into the warmest corner of our affection.

'Mister Englishmans,' continued our new friend, 'I like you; you are good fellow. Will you come see my poor house? Ever too unworthy of honourable attention, but nice things to see—table, chair; thinkee you like.'

There was no denying him, so, bowing low, we floated on his stream of conversation into a really attractive tea-house. The chair and table—clumsy articles at best, but inexpressibly dear to their owner's heart—were introduced to us with a few appropriate words, such as, 'Chair to sit,' 'Table can use.' Having relieved his feelings, our host stepped back and surveyed us with a smile of bland good-humour. We noticed an air of expectancy visible in the raising of his eyebrows.

'What does he want now?' whispered Kingston to Karakamoko.

'Me thinkee he velly glad you sit,' she replied in the same tone. The little man's smile grew broader, and he spread out both hands, palms upwards, in an inimitable gesture of entreaty.

'Will it bear me?' asked Kingston; 'I'm no chicken.'

'Thinkee can do,' encouraged Karakamoko.

We watched him anxiously; it was a doubtful experiment. Slowly and carefully he lowered himself on to the chair. For a moment it seemed as if it would bear him, but his great weight took effect—the chair trembled, creaked loudly, then collapsed. A shriek of dismay rose from the landlord. He gazed at Kingston lying among the remnants of his one and only chair; a moment of suspense followed, then his Japanese nature triumphed over all other feelings, and he burst into shouts of laughter. His merriment was infectious; it was some time before any of us were able to speak.

The crowd outside insisted on having the joke explained to them; Karakamoko and the innkeeper gave them an illustrated edition of the catastrophe, which was received with great applause, and soon the entire village was bubbling over.

That chair enlivened the rest of our stay at Sakurazawa; it kept exploding in little bursts of merriment, little bomb-shells of irrepressible

laughter, which fairly upset one after another of our party. It proved an endless theme on which to chaff Kingston ; and last—yet far, far from least! —it turned up quite unexpectedly in our 'little bill.' We had no idea that it was such a rare and costly article. The possessor of a dozen kitchen chairs would be quite a wealthy man in Central Japan.

I had lost my way. My friends were nowhere to be seen. Hoping to rejoin them on the other side of the mountain, I trudged on alone.

The trees had all disappeared, and had given place to short grass dyed by the summer sun. Higher up the rocks peeped out, fringing the sky with a bold outline as ragged in its sweep as the outstretched plumage of an eagle's wing. There was something grand and wild about these masses, sinking and swelling like Titanic billows stilled for ever by some mysterious force. The long line of rock, tossed into fantastic form, might well be some crest of overhanging foam, stayed, as it were, in mid-air, fixed for ever as it curved to the wild thunder of its fall. Over the uplands the breeze blew chill, for the sun had set and the dusk came creeping up the valleys. On I trudged. The road dwindled to a mere footpath, which in its turn faded away, till nothing but the mountain-side of tufted grass and flinty rock stretched before me. It was very lonely. The vastness of the outlook, the very

isolation of my vantage-point, which pictured forth the valleys as 'self-withdrawn into a wondrous depth,' and the after-glow of the sun as a type or symbol of the infinite, imparted a feeling of sadness to the scene. Man's soul sinks on bended knee when confronted with the problems of Space or Eternity.

Rounding the mountain-brow, I caught sight of the lake of Shimo-No-Suwa extending far below. I could make out the villages which dotted the side nearest to me, but its farther shore was lost in mist. A road wound along from village to village, its white, dusty length resembling a gray ribbon coiled among the green of the paddy-fields. It was a cheering sight, for the town of Shimo-No-Suwa was to be our destination for the night.

Downwards I plunged through gorse and fern, startling a covey of moor-fowl, and sending them whirring noisily down the mountain, making quite a stir of excitement in the still air. A loose boulder nearly sent me after them, as it slipped under my foot and crashed with ever-increasing leaps into the ravine below. The tussocks were drenched with dew; the ruddy browns and golden yellows of the bracken showed dimly in the faint light; the fronds were interwoven into a natural carpet, enlivened here and there by a wild-flower or tuft of feathery grass.

Half an hour more brought me to level ground,

where the cultivation of the little fields began. I stopped to inquire my way of an old labourer delving in his patch of cottage garden with a primitive hoe.

The old man smiled blandly as I came near, and, stopping his work, looked at me—the very essence of good-nature. I remarked that it was a fine evening. My remark was interpreted humorously, for he continued to smile with quiet amusement in his eyes. Thus encouraged, I threw a wealth of interrogation into my voice as I put the question, 'Shimo-No-Suwa?'

The smile deepened, and the faint sound of a chuckle came over the hedge. Then, as I stood there waiting patiently for an answer, he turned away and resumed his work. I could see his white hair making a little patch of grayness in the twilight. From the darkness of the cottage interior came the wavering sound of a spinning-wheel, forming a soft accompaniment to the strokes of the hoe.

With a heavy heart I trudged away down the dusky street. 'The next person I ask will be a woman; she, at least, will be able to talk,' said I to myself as I neared the scattered village.

At the door of the first cottage sat a comfortable matron, not as modest, perhaps, in her dress as could be wished, but, then, she was in the privacy of her own village, and felt more or less at home. She was inspecting the head of a little boy with

great interest. This good lady looked up at my approach, and then, without waiting for me to open the conversation, she began to talk. Tennyson's brook is the only simile that occurs to me for the moment, but it is sufficient. I saw no signs of her husband; probably he was one of the men who—to follow out the simile—had come and gone. A crowd collected. I never realized before that I was comical, but they found it out and enjoyed me immensely. There was nothing offensive in their mirth—quite the contrary: their manner was as jolly as so many children at a pantomime; but, then, I did not relish being the pantomime. What was I to do? The night had now fallen; I was tired and hungry, and had not the least idea on which side of the lake Shimo-No-Suwa was to be found. It was useless to question these people again, for I seemed to be becoming more amusing every minute.

Turning sadly away, I plodded on footsore and weary, for I had covered many miles in the course of the day. Soon I reached the open country, and, striking through the fields, followed a little path which wound along by the edge of the lake. All at once in front of me loomed a mysterious shadow, which on nearer inspection proved to be a countryman on high wooden sandals. It was too dark for him to see me distinctly, so he took me seriously, at once informing me that 'Shimo-No-Suwa san chi,'

which, being interpreted, meant that the town was still at the distance of three-quarters of a mile.

We were not destined to be fellow-wayfarers for long; soon a twinkling light appeared ahead, and, with a cheerful '*Sayonara*,' he left me to trudge on alone. I watched him enter the low doorway, and heard a woman's voice raised in welcome as he vanished behind the plaited matting.

''Twere vain to tell' how I scoured the town of Shimo-No-Suwa looking for my lost companions, how I questioned several of its 4,000 inhabitants—much laughter, but no satisfaction, resulting—how I entered every tea-house I saw, and called loudly on the name of Karakamoko, and how at last, just as I was contemplating the doorsteps with an eye to choosing my night-quarters, I stumbled across my weary ricksha man, whose ugly face appeared to me beautiful as that of some guardian angel. Never again will he believe that Englishmen are cold or unemotional. Arm-in-arm we proceeded to an adjacent tea-house, where a feast of no inconsiderable splendour was ordered in honour of what Kingston called 'the prodigal calf's return.'

CHAPTER XXVIII

WHICH TELLS OF *THE* GIRL

We spent many a pleasant evening in these Nakasendo tea-houses. Our little room, lit by our one candle, presented a cosy and cheerful appearance—a pleasant contrast to the dark and usually wet night outside. The rain would patter on the paper panes, the wind would howl under the broad eaves, but we heeded them not. Pleasantly weary, with the breath of the undulating mountain road still fresh upon us, we would stretch ourselves on the soft white matting, and drift away on the current of animated conversation. Karakamoko did not take much share in these post-prandial discussions. Her knowledge of English was limited, and even had she possessed the necessary ideas, she would have found much difficulty in expressing them. As a rule, when her various little duties had been performed, she would seek her *samisen*, and after a comical prelude or two would croon quaint ditties in a low and not unmusical voice. The very monotony of the primitive chords—recurring as they did again and again with strange unwearied per-

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sistence, with a peculiar but not altogether unpleasant dissonance in their dominant tones—lulled one into silence. Now and then a little chromatic would cry out as he ran up his life-ladder, urged on by the nimble fingers, but only for a moment, for the incomprehensible burden of staccato notes would begin again—a weird accompaniment to the unfamiliar song. There always seemed something indescribably sad about Karakamoko's singing, and yet I am willing to admit that it might have been a purely imaginative sadness, for the little singer did not appear to be affected by it. To a certain extent it was bird-like, but, then, no mere sublunary bird could warble such plaintive tunes, such musical melancholies. All her pent-up sorrows, whether real or imaginary, found vent in song, and sobbed and sighed to the muffled monotone of that old *samisen*. It really was like nothing earthly. Many a time we used to lie and listen to her in silence—a silence tinged with melancholy, for her voice shadowed forth the past and foretold the future, vague, incomprehensible, full of the unknowable secrets of life, presented to us in the light of a musical landscape, a pensive sound-picture in which all rugged outlines had been softened and rendered harmonious by the intervening mist of song.

I often wondered what was passing in that quaint little head under that fantastic coiffure. What train

of ideas flitted through her mind which could give rise to sounds so incomprehensible? With us music possesses many beautiful analogies to the world of mental emotion; it is the audible expression of the soul. The wings of thought pulsate more freely in an atmosphere of song. There are seasons when we become conscious of the walls of our prison-house, and long to escape from the coils of mortality. We are oppressed by the shackles of speech, weighed down by the limitations of language. It is then that the Angel of Music opens the portals of the infinite, and sings to us the secrets of eternity.

But by what analogous reasoning could we trace the current of Karakamoko's thoughts? Her music lay beyond the bounds of our analysis. It spoke to us of nothing connected with past experience or future imaginings. It had all the mystery of some face seen in dreamland—some face, human and yet not human, for no kindly and natural emotion set the seal of expression upon its dread and awful features While we lie spell-bound, unable to move, it watches us with quiet eyes—the eyes of the Sphinx —full of unfathomable thoughts.

And yet, perhaps, the music of Karakamoko was, after all, more illustrative of her mental attitude than we imagined. Only we were unable to solve the riddle. And what wonder? Karakamoko herself was always a stranger to us. We never understood her. In spite of daily—nay, hourly—companionship,

she always remained a mystery as far as we were concerned. At times the veil seemed as if about to lift, and then again some word or action whose motive lay far beyond our comprehension would make us realize that the gulf which separated us was a barrier no less real than the limitless oceans which flowed between our island homes. We were conscious of her trust, and even of her respect; a little kindness wakes an echo in every heart. Had we desired it, I doubt not that any one of us might have been admitted to her intimacy. But we did not desire it; we treated her with the protective consideration one accords to a child, and were repaid a thousand times by the daily evidence of her confidence and affection. Her mental attitude, however, was a *terra incognita* to us. We came within sight of the hills that encompassed it, but of the fair land itself we knew nothing, save that it was a land of perennial sunshine—a topsy-turvy land of delightful incomprehensibilities.

On rereading my impressions of these bygone days of travel, one thing strikes me almost with consternation. It is the large number of times I have been compelled to make use of the words 'little' and 'laughter.' And yet these two words convey my recollections of Japan more freshly and more forcibly than all the other words in the dictionary put together. They are, as it were, the dominant

motives in the merry roundelay played by Japanese travel. They are for ever in the air, and you are never allowed for one moment to forget them. They impress themselves, too, on the stranger's mind so deeply, and withal so delightfully, that years after, when, amid the larger life and more serious surroundings of Western existence, much that he would fain remember eludes recollection, these two motives sing again within his memory, and lure his thoughts away to the happy past—to the land of littleness and of laughter.

How is it that one finds many a pretty girl in Japan, but never a good-looking man? That is a question that oftentimes puzzled us. One author, whose book I have lately read, remarks something to the effect that the men of Japan appear to be of an entirely different race from the women. And so they invariably seemed to us. How such dainty, piquante, Dresden china creatures, with their almond eyes and beautiful complexions, came to possess such ill-favoured and all but grotesque lords and masters—such badly-matched pendants to hang on the other side of the fireplace of life—is indeed a mystery. Viewing them from the æsthetic standpoint, the term 'worser half' seems peculiarly appropriate to the Japanese husband. It might have been made for him! From our point of view—which was, I regret to say, a purely selfish one—

this dissimilarity of appearance was not without its compensations. Was it not a delicate attention on the part of a discriminating Nature—a compliment paid to our just appreciation of the opposite sex? The ugly little men had their uses in the scheme of composition. They were an effective foil to the superior attractions of their womenkind. Even so the Beast but serves to enhance the charms of the Beauty in the fairy-tale. It is a humble rôle to play in the comedy of Life. It demands neither ambition nor talent. It simply requires you to efface yourself, to 'take a back seat,' to become an effective back, ground. That the ladies of Japan are pretty does not admit of a doubt. In spite of the upward slope of their eyes, the tilt of their retroussé noses, the somewhat too ample charms of their rounded figures, their general fascination is not for one moment to be denied. Never have I seen such speaking glances, such pearly teeth set between the curve of rosebud lips, such young budding beauty, as I beheld long years ago in the Mikado's Empire. And then one must imagine all these charms enlivened and rendered a thousand times more attractive by sunny dispositions and unfailing good-humour. The very memory of them makes me hover dangerously near the borderland of poetry even now. I must avoid all farther description of their delightful persons if I am to have any regard for the sober quality of my prose.

Kingston and I shared one weakness in common: We both were open to the charge of an uncommon susceptibility. The sight of a pretty face stimulated our senses even as wine is said to stimulate the sensibilities of the abstemious. It warmed us into a generous emotion. Let me not term it 'weakness,' or, rather, if weakness it be, let me liken it to a silken garment flung over some not unmanly form. One can distinguish outlines of strength even though they are draped with a texture of softness. Susceptibility! The very word savours of a sneer! It is the weapon of cold-blooded wiseacres who have outlived the period of natural emotion, who are dead to the voices of such gentle prompters as enthusiasm and admiration. They fling the would-be reproach at us in no measured terms, and seek to confound hopefulness in Youth and imagination in Manhood with the maudlin sentimentality of school-boys. A plague on such ill-omened scoffers! For my part, I mean to be susceptible until I reach a ripe old age.

Now, Kingston's form of susceptibility was more boisterous, more audible, than mine. I was content to keep my admiration to myself. I decked the unknown in garlands of fancy, but I did not seek to immortalize her with blossoms of speech. The sight of her pretty face made life happier in my eyes. I wove a little unconscious romance around it, and then, with the last tribute of an admiring look, I

went my way, satisfied to know that in memory, at least, that face was mine, and in after-years would illustrate for me some out-of-the-way hamlet buried in the heart of Japan. Not so with Kingston. Cæsar's motto was ever in his thoughts. Having 'come' and 'seen,' he longed to 'conquer.' An elopement in a double ricksha, pursued by an irate Japanese father, presented itself to his imagination as a situation full of adventurous charm. Needless to tell, nothing definite ever came of it. It was but an innocent diversion—very real in his eyes full of fascinating possibilities, but utterly wanting in practical result. Still, he never lost hope. One pretty face chased out the memory of another, yet each was for the time being the recipient of 'imagination all compact,' of burning hopes, of quite inexhaustible enthusiasm.

I shall never forget when he burst in on me one day during our stay at Shimo-No-Suwa. It was but one out of many similar incidents, yet it may serve to illustrate a page in Kingston's rose-coloured volume of susceptibilities.

'I have discovered her,' he announced breathlessly.

'Have you?' I inquired, with a proper amount of sympathy in my voice.

'Such a pretty girl!' he went on, warming to the description. 'None of your painted beauties. A regular ripper. Finest-looking woman in Japan.'

'What!' I ejaculated. 'Better than the one at Kobé, or the siren of Kioto, or the two sisters whom you loved and lost at Gifu, or the——'

'I say,' he interrupted, 'will you shut up! You have an appalling memory. I don't believe there have been as many as you make out.'

'I think this is the thirty-first,' I said mildly.

'Well, anyhow, this one is simply immense. None of the others could hold a candle to her. They were —well, just girls. This one is *the* girl.'

'A fine distinction. Now, what do you expect me to do?'

'Come and be convinced, you doubter; and, by Jove! if you don't agree with me I'll eat my hat.'

By the way he bustled me out-of-doors you would have imagined that he was some belated passenger trying to catch a train. At the first street corner, however, he paused irresolute.

'Forgotten the way?' I suggested.

'No; it's not that.'

'Then, what are we stopping for?'

'Well, old man, I discovered her, didn't I?'

'You did,' I assented.

'So that she sort of belongs to me now, doesn't she? You won't poach, eh?'

'Kingston,' I said solemnly, 'this girl is your private property. I will respect your rights of conquest. Let us go on.'

Completely reassured, he again took the lead.

Threading our way among the many passers-by, I followed him along several streets. The intricacy of our course testified to the strength of his devotion. Nothing but love of a very superior quality could have guided him aright through such a maze of labyrinthine turnings. No unaided bump of locality would have been equal to the task. I was on the point of murmuring, 'Poor fellow! he *is* hard hit this time,' when of a sudden he came to a stop, and with extended forefinger indicated to me a little shop nestling under broad fluted eaves. I peeped in and beheld—*the* girl. Words fail me. Kingston had not exaggerated. Can I say more? She wore an ethereal something—a glorified garment of a warm hue which made a little glow of colour against the dark background. Details have escaped me. What wonder! If an angel paid you a visit, would you notice if his wings were well brushed? The general effect, however, was charming; the lights and shadows massed themselves in simple harmony; it was like a masterpiece by Teniers. We stood long in the friendly shadow of an adjoining tea-house, and watched the little maiden as she plied her daily vocation. She appeared to be selling some commodity which she kept in wicker-work baskets. Now and again a purchaser would stop, and after the interchange of a few words would pass on into the sunlight. She was quite unaware of our presence.

Kingston sighed. The responsibility of possession was evidently weighing heavily upon him. It is one thing to discover; but it is quite another thing to know what to do with your discovery.

We discussed his future campaign in whispers. He demanded my advice, yet scoffed at my suggestions. He plied me with questions. Many of them will be seen to be totally irrelevant.

What would I do if I were he? Oh, indeed! Did I forget that he had discovered her? Would I act as interpreter? Why was I so ignorant? Did I think she would speak to him without an introduction? How was it that I had such depraved views on the subject of women? Would I set fire to her shop so that he might have the opportunity of rescuing *the* girl? Why had I no go in me? Would I, at all events, consent to be a thief for two minutes, so that he might earn her undying gratitude by knocking me down? Why was I an ass? What was there to laugh at?

Of course nothing came of it. I wonder if we either of us expected any other conclusion to those day-dreams of ours. They were very pleasant while they lasted, and, after all, they were very harmless. But the world remained unchanged. That, after all, is not a regret, but a consolation. It is a consolation to know that She is still there. Yes, I am convinced that, should the reader visit the quaint township of Shimo-No-Suwa—should he be venturous enough

to penetrate to the little lane aforementioned—he will find *the* girl still seated there beside her wicker-work baskets, a little glow of colour in the dark interior, wholly oblivious to the startling fact that she was once 'discovered'—that on one never-to-be-forgotten occasion she became by right of conquest the private and personal property of Kingston.

CHAPTER XXIX

'BATH IN STREET'

A STIR of awakening life rose from the little street—rickshas rattling, women talking, girls laughing, children shouting, and every now and again the cry of some itinerant pedlar, which became audible above all other sounds on account of an ear-piercing quality not altogether unpleasant when softened by the distance. The sun glinted on the roofs of the opposite houses, and streamed in at the open window panel of our room.

'Well, Caricature!' shouted Kingston. He was in the habit of shouting; he said it was good for his lungs. 'Have you discovered where the bath-room is?'

Karakamoko, already dressed, was flitting about our room, mislaying articles of attire and then endeavouring to find them again; she was a busy little person. As Kingston spoke, she stood still just where the sunlight fell. Was it accidental, or was it prearranged? I often wondered. Her poses were so artistic, so effective, that my suspicions were aroused. It is said, 'Where Nature

fails, Art steps in'; but the saying does not hold good in every case, for both Nature and Art agreed to share the delightful task of adorning Karakamoko.

'Bath in street,' she answered cheerfully.

'Isn't there one to be had in the house?' asked Gordon.

'No can do,' replied our little guide. 'Have not see soap to-day; no can think where put him;' and she rummaged in the pockets of my overcoat.

We drew aside all the window panels, and inspected the unique bathing establishment below. It literally was, as Karakamoko had informed us, 'in street.' It was of considerable dimensions, encircled with flagstones and filled with hot water. Several bathers of both sexes were enjoying a morning tub. The steam-clouds, however, which rose from the heated surface of the water prevented our distinguishing more than the general outline of its occupants. An old lady, whose shrill accents could occasionally be heard above the babble of other voices, appeared to be endeavouring to fill the double capacity of money-receiver and policeman. She would break off an apparently interminable argument with some would-be customer, to make a raid upon the small boys who were trying to obtain free baths under cover of the steam.

Accustomed as we by this time had become to the want of privacy in the Japanese bath-room, the extreme sociability of this particular bathing estab-

lishment did not take us altogether by surprise. Still, when it became a personal matter, such classic disregard of all clothing jarred upon our native modesty.

'It's scarcely decent,' objected Gordon.

'Never mind, old man,' chaffed Kingston—'you can't have all the luxuries; and remember that it's decency versus cleanliness.'

'Come on,' said I encouragingly; 'it won't last long. We'll get it over as soon as possible. You mustn't laugh like that, Karakamoko; you compromise our dignity.'

'Oh, but you all look too muchee funny!'

'I dare say; we are quite aware of it. But, I say, do stop brushing Gordon Sama's coat with my hair-brush, like a good girl, and show us the way.'

Our procession must have been a novelty in Shimo-No-Suwa. Three tall Englishmen clad in pyjamas, draped in bath-towels, and personally conducted by a Japanese maiden, was a sight that could not be seen every day. The chorus of '*Han's!*' of '*Ha's!*' and of '*Ho's!*' which greeted our approach testified to the interest which our appearance excited among the other occupants of the inn. Our costumes were criticised with enthusiasm. Gordon's pyjamas — of pink and blue silk — called for remark. My bedroom slippers, of Indian manufacture and golden appearance, were commented upon in no measured terms. Kingston's

beard, however, seen to full advantage in his low-necked attire, fairly eclipsed all minor attractions. The ladies pointed it out to each other with admiring forefinger, while the men slapped their legs and drew in their breath with that peculiarly sibilant sound which the rustic in Japan keeps as the superlative expression of his respect and admiration. The length, breadth, and depth of it astonished them. That so many hairs could grow upon a single face was a matter of marvel. Indeed, according to Karakamoko's report of the impression we created, Kingston was known by the high-sounding title of 'the Honourable English Sir of astounding and much-to-be-envied hairiness.'

The inn was kept by three sisters, dear sympathetic souls whose hearts were overflowing with the milk of human kindness. Had they been blonde Englishwomen, 'fair, fat, and forty' would have described them to a nicety; being, however, subjects of the Mikado, playful, plump, and pleasing is more appropriate, and an excellent Japanese equivalent, besides having the additional advantage of avoiding that most delicate of subjects—a lady's age. These good creatures took much interest in us, that delightful and almost tender interest that young and fairly good-looking bachelors arouse in the hearts of maiden ladies. It cannot be called 'love,' and yet 'friendship' is too distant a term; it possesses the affection of the mother, tempered by

the coyness of the cousin. It is pleasant to be the recipient of such flattering attention, and we all found it comforting.

A large crowd had gathered to welcome us upon our arrival. Ricksha men and pedlars, coolies and mousmés, masters and servants, all took interest in us; even little children stopped their games to cluster around us. We created quite a sensation. The old lady who owned the bathing establishment experienced much difficulty in keeping order. She was flattered by our wish to bathe, and changed the silver dollar, which we gave her, with many expressions of gratitude and admiration. The other bathers emerged from the water in order to watch us; breathless, red, and naked, but not ashamed, they discussed our arrival, personal appearance, and probable manners and customs, with great frankness and good-humour. In the entire town of Shimo-No-Suwa I doubt if there were another curiosity that could have rivalled us in interest on that sunny morning.

That bath well repaid our courage. The water, when we had gradually accustomed ourselves to its temperature, was deliciously velvety and soft, with a faint effervescence in it. It was delightful to lie back and watch, with half-closed eyes, through a silver haze of steam, the quaint Eastern life ebbing and flowing in the little street. It is but one of a

thousand impressions, all more or less fleeting, which stretched themselves long ago upon the tablets of my memory. Yet it is not wholly forgotten even now, for, if I close my eyes and allow the train of recollection to summon up the past, I can still see the merry faces smiling down upon one, the line of uneven roofs basking in the sunshine, and the cold blue of the sky shining like polished steel in the light of the early morning.

CHAPTER XXX

THE INTERRUPTED LETTER

FINDING that rickshas could not be procured before 10 a.m., and having an hour to spare, I lay down to write a letter. To write in a tea-house is difficult. This is not a copy-book phrase, but a groan forced to the pen-point by the memory of many an aching bone. If one could paint a letter like Karakamoko, if a dozen blots joined by sundry dabs could be made to do duty for four sheets of coherent English, the difficulty would vanish; none of my friends, however, being conversant with hieroglyphics, I was obliged to fall back on pen and ink, but it made me very stiff.

'Hullo, old chap!' shouted Kingston. 'At it again, eh? What a head you must have! Chock full of ideas.' I shrugged my shoulders in modest protestation. 'What do you want to write for?' he continued.

'I'm writing to my best girl, and how do you expect me even to think of her when you're making such a row?'

'I never write,' he said in a tone of superiority.

'Much better not write to girls,' remarked Gordon.

'Why not?' I asked despondingly.

'Because you either say more than you mean, or mean more than you say; in either case you deceive the girl.'

'Say anything—write nothing,' added Kingston with questionable morality.

I faced my two advisers.

'Really, you two fellows are quite cheering; I——'

'Hold on!' interrupted Kingston; 'just wait till you've heard my story.'

'Continue,' said I, laying down my pen with a sigh.

'I was once young and green, too, like you, Watson, and in an evil hour I wrote to a girl.'

He stopped short and drew a deep breath.

'Did you get an answer?' I asked sympathetically.

'I did—from *the mother!*' Gordon and I smiled. 'It was no joke,' said Kingston solemnly.

'What did she say?' questioned Gordon.

'Six closely-written sheets.'

'Angry?' I asked.

'No such luck. She was all affection, was sure I'd make a good husband, and said I was to count on her maternal guidance in all the difficulties of life.'

'Whatever did you say to the girl?' I asked.

'That was what puzzled me, for I'd quite forgotten.'

'You must have been affectionate?'

'Possibly. Ugh! A narrow squeak, eh?'

'Take it to heart,' said Gordon to me; and, having ruined my peace of mind, they went out for a walk.

I gave a sigh of relief, but hardly had I taken up my pen, when pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat, came the sound of approaching sandals, and Karakamoko tripped into the room.

'You all alone?' she asked cheerfully.

'I'm afraid not.'

'Eh, how say?'

'I mean, I was a moment ago.'

'What you do?'

'I'm trying to write a letter.'

'Write? Ha, me savvy. Your old mother?'

'No-o-o, not exactly.'

'Seester?'

'Nearer it, but not quite right yet.'

Karakamoko looked puzzled.

'It's to a friend in England—a girl,' I explained.

'Ow!'

'Oh no! Not that sort of thing,' I said hastily. 'It's quite Platonic—just to tell her how jolly Japan is, you know.'

Karakamoko sat down beside me; my corner among the luggage held us both comfortably. I found myself looking at her little face with approval; it was so full of tender interest in my letter, and, above all, so pretty that I felt flattered. Of course the usual ray of sunlight stole in. Nature had told it off to dance attendance on Karakamoko, and right

merrily it discharged its delightful duties. It played among her dark tresses, it brushed her soft skin with powdered gold, and it twinkled here and there over her quaint little person with many a touch of luminous familiarity. I began to feel jealous.

'You speakee love?' she whispered softly.

'Oh no.'

'Send paper kiss?'

'Certainly not.'

Karakamoko sighed. I looked at her anxiously. What indiscreet question would she ask next?

'Nice girl?' she inquired sceptically.

'Very.'

'Muchee pretty?'

'I should think so.'

'What clothes have got?'

'Clothes?' I repeated, utterly taken aback. 'Well, 'pon my word, that is a puzzler! Let me see: I think she had on something blue when last I saw her; or was it gray? Yes, I think it *was* gray—just gray, you understand?'

'And what colour *obi?*' (sash).

This was worse than the Inquisition; however, as I had rashly embarked on the enterprise, I felt in honour bound to see it through.

'Pink, Karakamoko,' I hazarded at a venture.

'Ah! velly pretty.'

That pleased her, then. I felt triumphant. Gray and pink was a happy thought; the combination

was good. If I had only adroitly changed the subject at this crisis, all would have been well, but inordinate conceit at my success prompted me to soar to still further realms of fancy.

'Pink,' I murmured, as though lost in tender retrospect. 'Just a cheerful pink, with little blue and white spots wandering about, and ——'

'He! he! he!' gurgled Karakamoko.

'Why do you laugh?' I inquired severely.

'He! he! Oh, you too muchee funny man! You not muchee good at girl's clothes.'

So I was 'too muchee funny,' was I, and ignorant to boot? I determined to have my revenge.

'Not about that dress, perhaps, Karakamoko,' I said mildly; 'but—she has another.'

'What look like?' asked my little visitor.

'A dream: that is its technical name, I am told. It is "*chic*," "*décolletée*," "scrumptuous," "a creation of Paquin's"!'

'H-a-a!' gasped Karakamoko, thoroughly mystified.

We sat still after that, and looked at each other for a minute. She was evidently revolving a matter of importance.

'Watson Sama!' she said at length.

'Yes, Karakamoko?'

'You no—love—she?'

'No-o-o; that is to say—well, not *too* much.'

'Then plenty better you no write.'

Good heavens! This was Gordon and Kingston all over again. Had my three friends entered into a conspiracy?

'Why not?' I asked in surprise.

'Plenty—better—you—no—write,' she repeated.

'But why not?' I asked again.

'Me thinkee——'

'Well, what *do* you think?' I questioned, as she hesitated long over the two words.

She glanced up at me: there was a twinkle in her eye.

'Me thinkee flutteration.'

CHAPTER XXXI

OVER THE USUI PASS TO YOKOGAWA

Midway between the villages of Mochidzuki and Sakamoto towers the volcano of Asama-Yama. In this land where volcanoes abound, Asama-Yama holds a notable position. It rises out of a vast arid plain covered with volcanic *débris* and strewn with isolated rocks. The very monotony of the long levels which surround it, make its height and size the more remarkable. It is quite a landmark, for the magnificent sweep of its outlines can be observed from a great distance off. Its topmost cone, however, is rarely to be seen except on cloudless days, for its height attracts the wandering vapours, which find a fascination in hovering round this entrance to the subterranean world. The last eruption occurred many years ago; its lava-strewn track is still pointed out, where one dark night the fiery rush of heat overflowed and illuminated the country for miles around. More than one humble home was rendered desolate in that terrible hour, for in *those* days the hamlets clustered up its sides and nestled with unjustifiable confidence into its fissures.

The old mountain is not dead yet, for the peasants say that if the crater be reached the climber will be rewarded for his intrepidity by the sound of moaning rising from the depths below.

Nothing can present a more weird and desolate appearance than this vast plain, stretching away to the distant mountains that belt it with purple ranges. Tall pampas-grasses and swamps of sun-dried reeds are the only signs of vegetation, and when the wind blows—as it loves to do over this lonely spot—their feathery heads rustle mournfully in undulating waves. Now and then a ruined hut is to be seen crumbling to decay in its patch of neglected garden, the broken beams and rotting framework nearly lost to sight under a growth of weeds—pathetic memories of the lives that once called it 'home.' For the rest, nothing—nothing but loneliness, monotony, and an inexplicable sadness born of the voiceless wastes, and the one great mountain towering up in splendid but sinister isolation.

'How dreary it looks!' said Gordon.

We had been driving steadily for two hours and a half, but had not yet reached the other side of this plain. Asama-Yama, at a distance of about a mile, was being slowly left behind.

'Not a place to be benighted in,' I rejoined.

'What iniquitous roads!' growled Kingston.

'It's rather flattering to call this a road, don't you

think ?' I jerked out, as my ricksha plunged heavily over the stony ruts.

'It's a poor way of getting over the country,' he complained. 'I've been within an ace of playing leap-frog over this Johnnie's back nearly a dozen times. Oh !' he yelled, as a deeper hole than usual flung him on to the shafts. 'Stop ! Let me get out ! Call this driving, you yellow fiend ? It's more like dentistry.'

But when a ricksha man once gets you into his little torture-chamber of a conveyance, he is very loath to let you go.

'Let's wait for Karakamoko,' shouted Gordon. 'She is at least a quarter of a mile behind.'

'All right,' I assented. 'Hi, Kingston ! Stop !'

He did stop, but not in the way he intended, for at that instant his coolie stumbled, and ricksha, man and master rolled over and over in the black mud.

Kingston scrambled to his feet, but the coolie, after attempting to rise, groaned and lay still.

Gordon jumped out and tried to help him. The man was evidently in pain, but, with the self-control of his race, he looked at us with a smile.

'What's the matter ?' I called out.

'Sprained his ankle,' answered Gordon.

The poor fellow was assisted to a patch of grass at the roadside ; the act of being carried meant agony to him, but his smile never wavered. He

watched the willing but clumsy efforts to help him with a grateful light in his eyes.

Kingston was busy scraping the mud from his face, hands, and clothes with a fragment of slate. A rattle of wheels and a prolonged shout announced the arrival of Karakamoko. Her face wore a comical expression of gravity.

'What have done?' she asked anxiously as she scrambled out of her ricksha. Kingston pointed to the coolie with a humorous mixture of resignation and despair.

What it is to be a woman! Gordon and his band of male nurses were routed in a single battle; to tell the truth, they felt the unfitness of their position, and offered but slight resistance to the enemy's attack.

To see the way Karakamoko hung over the wounded man, to see the gentleness with which she touched him, to see her tearing her prized pink table-cloth to make a bandage for the sprained limb, chattering all the time in soothing Japanese, did our hearts good. There is nothing like a woman, after all.

When the ankle was satisfactorily bound up, her anxious look vanished, and a returning wave of jollity rippled over in a laugh.

'He must go my ricksha,' she announced, as if it were quite a decided matter.

'And what will you do?' asked Gordon.

'Ha!' she said gravely. This was a question

which had evidently not occurred to her. After deep thought she proposed : ' Me thinkee can walk.'

This amused us beyond words. If there was one thing in this world that Karakamoko's soul loathed, it was walking.

' Caricature, you're a brick !' applauded Kingston.

Karakamoko tried to look dignified. It was the most delicious imitation of dignity that can be imagined, and it was so comical that we all shook with laughter.

' Me no breek,' said the little woman tremulously, for our misplaced merriment had hurt her feelings. When one offers to make a great sacrifice, one does not expect it to be received with laughter. The corners of her mouth began to go down.

' It's all right,' said Kingston hastily. ' You must drive just the same. This Johnnie and I will get along famously.'

' But,' she stammered, pointing one chubby finger at the coolie, ' but—he no can run !'

' No, but I can.'

' Ho-o-o !'—very incredulously, with a scarcely respectful glance at Kingston's calves.

' Do you really mean it ?' I asked.

' Of course I do. I'd be a poor sort of animal if I couldn't run a few miles ; besides,' he continued with a cheerful wink, ' revenge is sweet, and I mean to bump him till he hasn't a grinder left. Come on, you joker !' and Kingston lifted the coolie as easily

as if he had been a child, tucking him into the ricksha with an exaggerated politeness that tickled the risibilities of the other coolies to a quite alarming extent.

When they had partially recovered, we started in the usual Indian file, led this time by Kingston.

'He seems pretty fit,' I remarked to Gordon; 'has he far to run?'

'Not very far,' he responded; 'the men tell me there is a tea-house a couple of miles off where we may perhaps be able to get a fresh coolie.'

Kingston was plodding on heroically. Every now and then he stopped to mop his streaming face. As time went on he became more and more lightly clad.

The coolie's face was as good as a play! Shakespeare's saying might truthfully be parodied into: 'Uneasy lies the coolie who rides a ricksha.' That an Honourable English Sir should drag his ever-to-be-unworthy body was a terrible idea to him. His protestations, his pathetic entreaties, his little ceremonious insistences, were of no avail—the big Englishman would have his way; and as he was bumped over the villainous road the same set smile of gratitude forced itself to his trembling lips.

The tea-house was reached at last; a fresh coolie was engaged; the lame man was carried indoors, and the landlord told to take good care of him. Before we resumed the road, Karakamoko came to me and whispered confidentially:

'Kingston Sama good man.'

'I'm with you there,' I acquiesced heartily.

'Ha! but you no see what he give.'

'To the coolie?'

She nodded, and, standing on tiptoe in a vain effort to reach my ear, said impressively:

'Will keep him wife and fammy-lee long time—no will starve!'

The short October afternoon was waning rapidly as we began the descent of the Usui Pass. The mountain sides were densely wooded, shadows lay under every tree. Faint gleams of white peeped out of the general obscurity as the silver stems of the birches caught the last rays of daylight. At times the canopy of foliage met above us and flung yet deeper shadows on the road. Glimpses through the veil of verdure showed us the distance, becoming more and more hazy as the minutes passed. The birds, who had kept up conversation as long as they could possibly see, went to sleep in the stillness overhead. The colours, too, went to sleep, each one donning his gray nightcap, and pretending that he was not a colour, after all, but a child of the gathering night.

It was a long descent, the road winding round and round the mountain flanks in wide semicircular coils; it had evidently been well made, but had been allowed to fall into bad repair. The greater part of it was laid over uneven logs supported by stanchions from below, the crevices being filled with stones

cemented together with mud. Now and then a boulder had to be avoided, often nearly as large as a ricksha. Sometimes we heard the sound of running water, and, straining our eyes, we could see the gleam and sparkle of a little brook as it sprang in long leaps down the bank, paused a moment on the levels in the road, then flung itself over the other side and was lost to sight in the gloom. Sturdy peasants trudged past, each driving a woebegone pony in front of him with many a resounding whack on its matted hide when the overladen animal stopped to pant for breath. The Japanese are said to be kind to animals, but their treatment of ponies made us indignant. Many a time did Gordon remonstrate with them. Roars of laughter, and occasionally a crusty word or two, were all the answer he got; and as we left them, whack! whack! whack! came the sound of blows as the sticks fell on the poor animals' backs. Kingston often wished to get out and fight them; he said that three Englishman were worth a dozen Japanese, and that he would 'tackle' eight himself, if we could account for the remaining four. But I told him the story of Don Quixote and the shepherd of Signor Haldudo, and how the ill-timed interference of the knight was paid in grievous coin on the shoulders of Andrew, at which Kingston swore a mighty oath and said it was a 'bally shame!'

At the foot of the pass we came suddenly upon a

singular range of hills, or, more correctly speaking, series of cliffs. Their summits were jagged, being split and rent into countless isolated peaks till they resembled the teeth of some gigantic saw. Fronting the west, they stood out clearly against the faint yellow of the sky.

Soon the lights of Sakamoto twinkled out of the twilight; faster and faster we drove as our coolies put on the usual professional 'spurt,' our wheels making such an advertising clatter on the stones of the little street that when at last we pulled up, with a jerk, in front of the village inn, we found a large and appreciative audience awaiting us.

The tea-house was undergoing what is known in England as a 'spring cleaning,' though I have observed that that epidemic is not confined to one season of the year.

This particular 'spring cleaning' was evidently at its height. The paper walls had all been drawn aside, and the whole interior of the house was exposed to view. The lord and master—how ironical the term at a time like this! had wisely decamped, evidently fearing the infection, and was to be seen with a sympathetic friend on the far side of the road. They had rescued a chess-board and a small lamp, and, like two philosophers, were making the best of a bad job. The lady of the house was seated in the bare front-room of the inn. She was very busy, her attention being entirely occupied

with a large pot of rice and a small yellow baby. When she saw us she showed her black teeth in a cheerful smile; it evidently pleased the good lady that we should see her at such a triumphant moment of her life. Neither the baby nor the rice-pot could spare her, so, turning round, she called loudly to someone in the background. Four little *mousmés* at once answered the summons. All carried mops, and all were out of breath. They surrounded us with loud choruses of 'Hai!' and 'Ha!' falling on their faces in a perfect whirl of ceremonious excitement. Kingston lifted them up tenderly, an act of unexpected gallantry which was much approved of by the villagers. After this interlude we all sat down on the doorstep. As a natural consequence tea appeared on the scene. The landlord and his friend strolled over to join the party. Their little lamp proved a valuable acquisition, as without its aid we would have found it difficult to guide the tiny cups to their proper destination. We made a little oasis of light and laughter in the midst of the surrounding night. 'Spring cleanings' were forgotten, and happiness reigned supreme.

The moon rose over the dark roofs. It glittered in the puddles which lay on the road, and n a moment they were transformed to liquid silver. The shadows from overhanging gables fell black as ink athwart this sea of moonlight. One star

twinkled out of infinity. It was a picturesque scene. The lamp lit up the immediate foreground with a circle of golden light. It cast a weird reflection on the many strange faces all watching us with interest; it wavered in ghostly uncertainty on the background of eccentric dwellings. But its reign was as that of a glow-worm, compared to the luminous enchantment that fell from the pavilion of night. Half the village was plunged in darkness, the other half was clearly yet exquisitely defined in the wan light, while beyond, away up the road which led to the mountain pass, soft masses of foliage grouped themselves in faint blue haze. The breeze brought us scents from the woodlands.

'We must be going,' said Gordon; 'it is getting late, and we have still many miles in front of us.'

It is impossible to describe the storm which our intention to depart called forth. The innkeeper, his wife, the four girls, the crowd, even the yellow baby, roared at us. All spoke at once—the noise was deafening.

'Perhaps we'd better stay,' said Kingston; his manly heart was touched at the sorrow of the four little maids—one of them was very pretty.

'Say something soothing,' I entreated; 'if this goes on, that baby will burst.'

'Plenty better you sleep Sakamoto,' joined in our weary guide. 'Thinkee Yokogawa no tea-house have get.'

But Gordon was firm. So, taking our places once more, we drove away into the night.

That drive was a memorable experience. We had many narrow escapes. Where the moonlight fell it was bad enough, but where the road lay buried in shadow it was simply awful. Our paper lanterns swung wildly from side to side as the rickshas swayed and rocked over the uneven road. A wolfish dog sprang out of the darkness—I could see his lean form looking blue in the moonlight as he kept pace with us. The coolies yelled at him, and presently he disappeared. Through the still night air we heard his ghostly howl, one long, melancholy note vibrating on and on till it died away. There is a deep human sadness in a dog's howl. Do they think of other existences? of future possibilities? of present voiceless servitude? From whatever springs of feeling it may arise, it strikes some ghostly chord in us and awakes a shudder.

In spite of the exacting nature of the road, I found time to admire the mellow beauty of the night. There was a solemn stillness, a profound peace in the moonlight, that was very impressive. All Nature lay, not asleep, but in a state of expectancy, of communion with the stars, while the spirit of night wandered over the world upon the wings of the breeze. I wonder what there is in such a scene to make man feel not quite at home, almost as if he

were an alien, an intruder; as if he had stumbled unawares, in his clumsy human way, into a moonlit sanctuary where fields and trees and flowers, all robed in silver, are hushed in the silence of voiceless prayer. It was very beautiful. The dim horizon purpled on the sky-line. Near at hand all was clear as noonday, the shadow of the hedges being sharply defined against the frosted brilliancy of the night. Farther off, the dream-like distance melted away into deeper and deeper depths of shadow. The pale illumination was weird, yet infinitely beautiful as a ghostly dawn heralding the splendour of some ethereal day. A delicious freshness pervaded the air. The smell of the moist earth and the touch of the falling dew on our faces were very pleasant.

My heart swelled within me as I drank it in. No mere terrestrial mode of expression can tell what feelings are ours at such times; for it is impossible that human speech, however beautiful, or that human mind, however gifted, can describe feelings akin to the secrets of eternity. A deep sense of thankfulness to the Unseen took possession of me, not only for the pleasant places in which my lot was cast, but also for that which was in my eyes a far greater gift—the ability to appreciate them intensely.

The memory of that moonlit hour is one of the pleasantest that haunt me now. It was our last hour of ricksha wandering, for on reaching Yokogawa we reluctantly bade farewell to the Nakasendo and returned once more to the paths of civilized life.

CHAPTER XXXII

TŌKIO *EN FÊTE*

It was the eve of the Mikado's birthday.

Gordon burst into Kingston's room, newspaper in hand.

'I say, you fellows, shall we go and see the review?'

'Read it out,' I suggested.

He complied with my request.

'It'll be no end of a lark!' shouted Kingston, brandishing the poker in a whirl of military excitement.

I avoided a cut direct; Gordon just escaped falling a victim to a back-handed sweep. When Kingston had been disarmed, we discussed the question more calmly.

'Shall we take Karakamoko?' I asked.

Now, when we left Kobé, we had decided to part from Karakamoko on reaching Yokohama. But the long days of travelling over the Central Mountains had endeared the little maiden to each one of us. We had come to know her so well, and had grown so accustomed to her cheery laugh, and to watch

her flitting about our rooms, that when the time came which was to have separated us, we could not find it in our hearts to send her away. So, with much duplicity, we all pretended to forget our former decision, and Karakamoko stayed on, and dispensed sunshine and laughter as of yore.

When I asked the above question, she was sitting on the floor near the window, sewing a button on one of Gordon's shirts. Hearing her name mentioned, she looked up, and said cheerfully :

'Ha! me like go see Tōkio.'

A pause ensued. No one spoke, but we looked at each other with a smile.

The Emperor's birthday came at last. It was brilliant weather. The sun streamed from out a sky of stainless blue. Kingston was in uproarious spirits, and resembled a jolly schoolboy on a Saturday afternoon. He disgraced us repeatedly by winking at the girls, chaffing the pompous station-master, and roaring with laughter on the slightest provocation.

Talk of 'animal spirits'! No animal that I have the pleasure of knowing would be large enough to contain the quantity of spirits which Kingston bottled up; and even did such a wonderful creature exist, it would live in constant danger of its life, for Kingston's spirits were explosive.

Karakamoko was in a state of violent excitement.

Her fears that it might rain had been painful to witness. Her dress, I believe, was the chief cause of this anxiety about the weather. In Kingston's words, Karakamoko had 'got 'em all on.' Her *obi*, a present from Gordon, was of soft pearl-gray silk shot with crimson ; her shoes, an offering from me, were the daintiest pair of patent leathers that Yokohama could produce. Oh, those shoes! Karakamoko chose them herself, and her importance, her airs, her naïve joy, on that occasion, were delicious to see. The new toys were taken to bed with her every night, and all her spare time was spent in polishing the nice shiny leather with a silk handkerchief. In her luxuriant rolls of black hair she stuck two splendid skewers which Kingston had given her ; and altogether you could not have found a better dressed or a merrier little woman than Karakamoko San in all Yokohama—no, not even in the whole length and breadth of Japan.

The reader must not think that Karakamoko was satisfied with merely receiving presents. On the contrary, she had an even stronger passion for giving them. She had very few trinkets such as girls love ; all had been bestowed upon her innumerable friends with a perhaps hardly discriminating generosity. The gift of a daintily-illustrated prayer-book to a blind beggar, or, on another occasion, of a comical ivory carving to a ricksha man, does not strike me as appropriate ; but, then, I am full of

Western prejudices, and quite unable to fathom the analogical reasonings of the Japanese mind.

I shall never forget the day when she bought some cheap blue buttons—coloured glass, I imagine—and sewed them on to my dress-coat, having previously cut off and thrown away the original ones, because they were 'too muchee ugli.' Her delight when I thanked her fervently knew no bounds. She made Kingston the present of two paper butterflies which she could keep flitting overhead with the delicate manipulation of a fan. Kingston was much moved, and assured her that they would be 'jolly useful.' He treasures them still in the old tobacco-tin which was their travelling home. She painted her own portrait for Gordon, a wonderful work of art, executed entirely in cheerful colours purloined from Gordon's paint-box. The amount of gratitude Gordon flung into his acceptance of this monstrosity raised him to the topmost pinnacle of our estimation, for it fully justified her nickname. And it was an open secret among us that she was working a yellow silk handkerchief—we knew not for whom—a startling piece of colour, with a dragon and a lizard disporting themselves at opposite corners. We had all seen it accidentally, though we would not have told her so for worlds, for it was a great secret, and was worked only in the dead of night by the light of a candle, when she believed that we were safely asleep.

As our train left the city behind it, Kingston startled us by shouting :

'There's old Fugi at last!'

We all rushed to the window. In the far distance, over a hazy line of forest, rose the glittering crest of the great mountain of Japan. We had tried for days to catch sight of it from the bluff and other heights in the neighbourhood of Yokohama, but Fugi was as coquettish as an Eastern beauty, and had hitherto concealed her face from us behind a diaphanous veil of clouds. Her form we knew well, for was it not carved or engraved, painted or inlaid, on innumerable works of art? We were destined, however, to see it at last, for all night long the Japanese witches had been at work with their brooms polishing the sky to a deep, burnished blue, in honour of the great national holiday. But one little wisp of cloud had escaped their eyes; it was only a transparent lace petticoat, so to speak, but the bashful Fugi made the most of it, and draped it round her lower slopes like the modest mountain that she was. But above! It was past wonder. The virgin snows blushed in the rosy light. Radiance unspeakable, set in tender blue, smiled down on us :

> 'On a throne of mist, in a robe of clouds,
> With a diadem of snow,'

quoted Gordon with unconscious reverence in his voice.

We reached Tōkio shortly before nine o'clock. Outside the station the usual rows of ricksha men were drawn up. Twenty-five of them answered Kingston's summons. A free fight ensued. I fell to the lot of a muscular native. Kingston and Gordon were whirled off as spoils of war. The thick of the combat, however, raged round Karakamoko. We waited patiently for her on the outskirts. At last she appeared, red, hot, and very indignant at being treated with so little ceremony. She scolded them volubly, but they only laughed. We were all the worse for wear.

'O-oo-ee!' screamed Karakamoko.

'What is it?' we inquired.

'See flag—one, two, tree, be-a-utiful. Ow!'

Tōkio was certainly very gay. Rows of Chinese lanterns of every possible size and shape were suspended from strings, and swung to and fro in the light breeze. They were twined in and out in many coloured garlands, spanning the long vistas of houses with fairy chains, under which the good-humoured crowd ebbed and flowed. From countless windows and innumerable balconies thousands of flags fluttered on flower-decked poles, while every here and there the eye caught the glint of golden embroideries draping the colourless walls with brilliant effect. There was an opulent splendour in the rich decoration, almost impossible to exaggerate. Perhaps it borrowed somewhat of its brightness from the floods

of sunlight which enriched all that was beautiful, and even lent a transient charm to all that was sordid and mean. And then the reader must take into account the fascination of the foreign element in all that we saw: the unaccustomed surroundings, the long street with its fantastic architecture, the distant domes, the unfamiliar blue of the sky.

What a strange crowd it was which jostled along those busy thoroughfares on that bright November morning! As I think of it, I am there again; some thoughts form as enchanted a carpet as any to be found in fairyland.

Will the reader accept a seat in my ricksha? perhaps a drive through Tōkio may prove amusing.

We go slowly, for all the world is astir, and speed is dangerous. The street is alive with rickshas; collisions are imminent, but are avoided with much dexterity and many shouts. The shops, you see, are all open, and are driving a brisk trade. We wind our way in and out among the groups of people and passing carriages with many a warning yell from our careful coolie. There is Kingston just ahead. Ah, the rascal! He is beaming on that pretty girl in green, and she, the hussy! seems quite to like it. If you turn round, you can see Karakamoko following us. Her face is the happiest object in all this happy crowd. She is looking a little self-conscious just now, for she is hoping that people are taking

proper notice of her pretty sash and new pins. The bewitching shoes are evidently being kept as a trump card, in case all else fails to attract attention. Gordon is somewhere ahead; we cannot see him at present.

Let us watch the crowd. Did you ever, out of dreamland, see a more varied, quaint, or picturesque stream of people? Such wonderful clothes and such wonderful want of clothes! Look at that fat old gentleman in the blue trousers, with the expression which might be appropriate if he had swallowed a poker. He is not the 'Lord High Executioner,' though his long sword may lead you to suppose so; he is only a policeman. What pretty lanterns above that shop! and did you see the little woman on the balcony smiling to us? Of course we return the bow; we must keep up the national character.

Gently, O ricksha man! The box of that pedlar passed unpleasantly near to our heads. The man's lungs, too, are of the strongest; see how he hurries past us, shouting his wares lustily, keeping up a sort of jerky vocal accompaniment to his quick walk and to the swinging motion of his goods as they dangle from the bamboo pole. How bright it all is! How gay! How animated! Here comes a rice-cart 'rawn by a team of nearly naked coolies. We can near them long before they come into sight, for that peculiar chorus, without which they never seem to work, rings along the street and is audible above all

other noises. Listen to it now. Is it a shout or a groan? 'Ha, ho, ho! Hui! Ho, ho, ha!' Here they come, poor fellows! How their yellow skins glisten with perspiration! And how terribly serious they look, as they strain at the rude harness! The weird, panting sounds swell, pass us in full cry, then grow fainter and fainter as they toil into the distance. Pheu! what a smell! Though I assure you that was a mild one compared to some of my old friends. Ah! you should try a whiff of cuttle-fish fried in oil. Japanese cooking is certainly not wanting in flavour. These yellow-robed men are priests; look at their shaven heads. That band of hatless youths represents the student element; how jolly they look! No dust from time-worn folios allowed to gather there. You would hardly imagine that these happy, ugly faces were ever 'sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought.' And yet it is out of the student ranks that Japan draws her cleverest men. 'What pretty little girls!' you cry, as we pass several in a narrow lane overhung by broad roofs. Yes, they are pretty, and merry, too, over that game of shuttlecock. Is it not wonderful that they can play at all with baby-burdens strapped to their backs? How warm the sunshine is! it makes driving quite pleasant. 'Tops are in, kites are out,' and the amount of energy with which each sturdy youngster lashes his personal property speaks well for the vigour of the race. How charmingly antiquated these country cousins

look as they stump about on their high wooden sandals, and stare in open-mouthed admiration at the wonders of the metropolis! Dear, worthy souls! I am sure I have met them on the Nakasendo, and I long to get out and tell them so; but it would not do —my Japanese is too good to use. That must be a tea-house opposite us now; look at the girls, with their tinted complexions and powdered necks; and, yes! that is the *samisen* that we hear tinkling through these open panels. There! I thought they would soon catch sight of us. No, no, young woman! it won't do. These seductive smiles and alluring bows are quite thrown away upon us; we have no time to waste over green tea to-day. Ah! there is Gordon at last; he is making signs for us to stop. I suppose this is the entrance to the review ground. We must get out and discharge the ricksha.

'Come this way!' shouted Gordon.

We followed him closely. An immense circle of spectators surrounded the large open space on which the review was taking place.

'No can see—no can see,' said Karakamoko plaintively.

We were hemmed in by the crowd. The poor little girl was nearly lost to sight; I could just see her troubled eyes, above which the silver pins 'bobbed' tremblingly. She did not look happy. No one was taking any notice of the bright little shoes.

'Take my hand,' I said, as I held it out to her. She seized it eagerly and smiled her gratitude. Quaint little hand—so small, so soft! I felt as if I were leading a child. Together we stemmed the current, Kingston's broad shoulders acting as a human breakwater immediately in front of us. What a crush there was! Girls screaming, pushing, giggling, men and women hot and excited, but always good-humoured, striving to see what was going on inside the magic circle.

The review had already begun. Fortunately, at this crisis we caught the friendly eye of a soldier who, with his comrades, was engaged in keeping the crowd within appointed bounds. The Japanese Tommy Atkins presented arms. We all saluted. Gordon spoke to him. The veteran looked at us, pointed to Karakamoko, then shook his head. Gordon put his hand into his pocket, Tommy Atkins smiled, a metallic tinkle was heard, and in a few moments we had left the crowd behind us. Our new escort conducted us across the field towards that part of the ground where the Mikado was watching the review.

As we approached the Imperial presence, I heard a little suppressed choke at my elbow: it was Karakamoko. The poor girl was trembling in every limb. A breathless 'Ha!' was all that she could say. The national awe inspired by the supposed divinity of Majesty was strong upon her.

Her eyes were fixed in wonder not unmixed with fear upon a mounted figure watching us from a little distance.

'He's only a policeman,' I explained.

'Ha!'

'There is the Emperor over there on the gray pony.'

'Oh!'

'It's all right,' I continued, laughing; 'he won't eat you. He's only a man.'

'Ou-u!'—this expressive of utter incredulity.

There was no time for further conversation, for, taking up a position behind Royalty, we devoted all our attention to the review.

If I were a *Times* correspondent, I could no doubt describe in a brilliant and graphic manner the various military manœuvres which we witnessed. But I am not a gifted war-correspondent; I am only a 'globe-trotter.'

Looking back upon our introduction to the Japanese Army, I am compelled to own that it did not impress me with a due sense of its importance, and now that its efficiency in the field has been so victoriously proved, my want of foresight comes back to me with humiliating distinctness. It is so easy to say, 'I could have told you so'—after the event has taken place—that the frank confession, 'I could *not* have told you so,' may possibly meet with the leniency which its candour deserves. If

the reader wishes to lavish discriminating praise, let it be bestowed upon Karakamoko, for that far-seeing young lady was repeatedly heard to express the opinion that *her* army could conquer any other army—nay, any combination of armies which the kingdoms of the world could bring against it.

I regret to say that the humorous element took complete possession of me that morning. How often is this the case! At the very moment when every holy tie, every sacred association, reminds us that we must be grave, serious, circumspect, the funny little devil within tickles our risible faculties with such quaint notions, such comical ideas, that we would give anything to be able to shout with laughter. It is very indecent, I own, but it is very human.

There was a puddle. Someone ought to have filled it up, for it lay in the middle of the track along which the Lilliputian warriors had to pass. It was a big puddle, and Japanese soldiers are little men.

On they came, bands playing, colours flying, accoutrements flashing, in a long glittering line. Martial pride, loyalty, patriotism, thrilled every heart; no one thought of the puddle. On they came, nearer and nearer, forty little legs moving like clockwork to the One, two, One, two, of a cheerful quick-march. The Imperial vantage-ground was reached. In the twinkling of an eye the front

rank of the human machine presented arms: then the puddle claimed its own. The Japanese love cleanliness; the Japanese hate cold water. Poor, poor little men! The rear ranks saw the fate of the victims, but it was too late; there was no escape. On, on, pressed onwards from behind, swept onwards from around, man after man marched to his doom. But their faces! their attitudes! it was too comical. Our sides ached with laughter.

When I speak of 'sides' in this comprehensive way, I must not be thought to include the staid sides of Gordon or the plump sides of Karakamoko. Gordon took life too seriously to give way to such unseemly mirth; and as for Karakamoko, her soul was swelling with such warlike enthusiasm that mirth in any shape or form was for the time abhorrent to it. She would as soon have thought of clapping the Mikado on his Imperial back as of laughing at *her* army.

It was a brilliant cortège that was grouped around the Emperor. Stars and crosses, medals and orders, glittered on uniforms of every possible colour, from the scarlet of Britain to the white of Austria, from the epauletted blue of the navy to the flowing silks of the Chinese Empire.

As for the Mikado himself—I am afraid that, like his army, his appearance is not calculated to impress the casual observer with a proper sense of admiration. The stoop of the spare

shoulders, the melancholy droop of the whiskers, (since fallen victims, I rejoice to hear, to the sacrilegious razor), the sallow skin, the lack-lustre eye, did not to our minds form an appropriate 'mortal coil' for the exalted state of Imperial authority. It is not his fault. We are often deceived by words, empty phrases, mere air, which in our too fertile imaginations we are apt to clothe with a dignity beyond their own.

Emperor! What gorgeous imagery, what unapproachable grandeur, what more than mortal majesty, the very word summons to the mind by the subtle witchcraft of a name! To me it suggests the Proconsulare Imperium, when Rome was still Mistress of the Universe, when such names as Augustus and Hadrian rolled on a stream of martial glory to the remotest confines of the known world.

A shrewd observer has, I think, remarked something to the effect that life is an endless shaking off of prejudices. I shook one off that morning. The word 'Emperor' leaves me quite calm now; you might as well try to excite me with 'chimney-sweep.'

The gray pony on whose broad, comfortable back the Mikado was lounging appeared strangely familiar to me. Where had I seen him before? The question puzzled me for a long time. At last I remembered—Dobbin! Dear old Dobbin! How could I have forgotten my once favourite rocking-

horse, with the delightfully removable tail, which I had loved and lost long years ago? (I refer to the steed, not to the tail, though, truth to tell, that useful appendage disappeared several years before the main body. Its loss was much felt. With it fled much of the dignity of the old charger. From this it may be learned that even a removable tail has its disadvantages.) Disappearance in the toy world is the equivalent of death; death, we are told, is but the threshold to a higher form of life, so why grudge poor Dobbin an ascending step in the equine world? Why refuse him the pleasing metamorphosis from a child's rocking-horse to an Emperor's pony? Dobbin was ever a stanch believer in the theory of transubstantiation. I have known him change from a rocking-horse to a railway-train at full speed in the twinkling of an eye. And if our way of life be taken into account in any future meting of rewards and punishments, surely no one deserves better than old Dobbin, for no merely human life is subject to such continual ups and downs as that of a rocking-horse. It is pleasant thus to meet old friends with new tails.

'Wake up, old man!' shouted Kingston, slapping me on the back. Some people use their friends as athletes use dumb-bells. It was very satisfactory to know that Kingston's muscles were in superb condition, but I could have dispensed with his particular way of proving it.

'I thought you might like to see the end of the review,' he continued.

'It surely can't be over yet!' I said in surprise.

But so it was. The bright colours of the soldiery were melting into the gray of the populace. The body-guard of the Emperor dispersed like a little flight of butterflies before a puff of wind. The Mikado dismounted, entered a carriage, and was driven rapidly away. Even Dobbin ambled off, without one look of recognition on his wooden face. We felt stranded on the little space of grass left by this receding crowd.

'Now then, Caricature! it's all over,' exclaimed Kingston.

'Yes, all over!' repeated her little voice very sadly.

CHAPTER XXXIII

GOOD-BYE, KARAKAMOKO

It is a charming sketch. I have it before me now as I write, and as it looks at me the past becomes present, and the long years vanish like mist. Again I see Gordon standing at his old travelling easel, and Karakamako posing for him. It is in Kingston's room, a large one facing the sea, and the throb of breaking waves strikes on the ear.

'Now then, Karakamoko, don't stoop!' comes Gordon's voice as he mixes the colours on his palette, and eyes his work critically with head on one side.

'Me so tired—thinkee must sit,' pleads the model plaintively.

'Why, you've only been standing for five minutes!' grumbles the artist.

'Hoo-o!'—this very incredulously. 'Me thinkee one hour, like see now—leg do sleep.'

Then comes a pause for rest, refreshment, and criticism, the refreshment being a sociable smoke in which we all take part.

The colours are as fresh to-day as they were years ago; not even an inquisitive ray of sunlight has been allowed to peep at it.

Dear little Karakamoko, how happy this sketch made you! How you danced round it, and tried Gordon's patience sadly by your ceaseless endeavours to see it, when you ought to have been posing in quite another attitude! How particular you were that he should make you pretty, and that your new sash should be done full justice to! And—oh yes!—how you pleaded to be allowed to wear the patent-leather shoes; and when the tyrant proved adamant, his artistic sense rebelling against these dainty intruders, how you nearly wept, and only returned to smiles with the aid of chocolate creams!

Gordon has done his work well. The sketch has caught much of the sunshine of your butterfly nature. Your soft, black eyes, with a merry twinkle in them, the Cupid bow of your lips just curving upwards into a smile, even the dimple lurking in your chin, are all there—unchanged. I alone am changed. I am glad of that. I like to dream that you are always as you were then. I could not bear to think of you growing old, wrinkled, decrepit, with the gray stealing slowly over the glossy black of your hair. To me you are always young, always happy, always Karakamoko—the very personification of a sunbeam or the tender, light-hearted merriment of an April day.

It was night. The flickering candle-light danced on the walls and cast quaint reflections upon the floor. Few sounds were to be heard in the hotel, the shutting of a distant door or the soft foot-fall of someone passing along the silent corridor. A faint whisper, rising and falling, told of the little waves lapping the shores in the darkness below.

I was tired, my one thought being to make haste and get to bed. As I shook out my pyjamas, something dropped from them and fell to the ground. In the feeble candle-light I could not see what it was. I picked it up ; it was something wrapped in silk paper, and it felt soft. I crossed the room to the chimney-piece, where the candle was burning, and looked at it curiously. It was an oblong parcel, sealed at each end with a quaint coloured seal. On the soft silk paper my name caught my eye. It *was* my name, but how unfamiliar it looked, how strange, how original! It had evidently been fashioned laboriously with many fantastic ornamentations, many curious devices, not with a pen—the touches were too soft for that—but with a paint-brush.

As I stood wondering, a faint odour made itself felt. Yes, it was Japanese. The seals, one tender rose-colour, the other delicate blue, were impressed with a wonderful dragon. Not a fearsome dragon, such as one sees fossilized in bronze in the curios-shops, but a friendly, sweet-tempered creature, with almost a smile curling his well-stocked fangs. I

recognised him at once—he was Karakamoko's dragon.

I opened the parcel tenderly. A moment of suspense, then out fell—*the handkerchief!*

Oh, smile not, reader! Think of all that these two words meant. The weary hours when, travel-tired, the little maiden had often stolen from her warm bed to weave these wonderful colours; the terrible self-restraint which had been exercised in order to keep a secret of such importance; and last, but, oh! how far from least! the loving thoughts which must have chased each other the while through her busy head, and formed, so to speak, a very warp of kindliness interwoven with the woof of soft silken shades. And—*all for me!*

'Karakamoko sails to-day,' said Gordon, as he joined me after breakfast.

'I know it,' I returned gloomily.

'I have just been to see her,' he went on. 'She is in low spirits, poor girl! I had no idea that she had grown so attached to us.'

'What did she say?'

'She wants to say good-bye to you.'

'Now?' I asked in some surprise.

'Yes, now; she sails in two hours, you know.'

'But I meant to see her off.'

'So did I, but she would rather we didn't.'

'Why?'

'Oh! she has these Japanese friends; they'll be at the boat, I expect. To do her justice, she seems so sorry to leave us that I fancy it will be easier for her to say good-bye here.'

'Where is she?'

'In her room; and look here,' added Gordon as I moved off: 'tell Kingston to say good-bye to her after you've seen her.'

When I reached the door I knocked lightly, and, receiving a soft answer in Japanese, entered.

Karakamoko was standing with her back to me, looking out of the window at the sea enveloped in gray mist—a melancholy harmony with the dull November day. The room was very neat and clean. Her old *samisen*-case lay on the bed; beside it was the pink table-cloth, already packed. Dear old pink table-cloth! what memories you conjure up now!

'Karakamoko!' I whispered.

She did not move. The dreary monotony of waves came faintly to the ear. There was a sorrowful rhythm in the sound, like the muffled heart-beat of the ocean. My own heart was very heavy. This winsome wee maiden, with her merry laugh and dainty ways, had become very dear to us all. Her companionship had been so pleasant, and we all cling to life's pleasures till Time steals them from us. We are right, for who knows if they will ever visit us again? 'Nevermore' is a sad word, and it was to be nevermore for us then.

'Karakamoko!' I said again.

She turned round slowly. The gray light fell upon her face, and I could see that it was strangely moved. For a moment she hesitated; then, taking three steps towards me, with an impulsive movement she took my hands in hers.

'You come say good-bye?' she asked in a low voice.

I nodded. I could not trust myself to speak.

'Will forget Karakamoko,' she went on sadly—'only poor Japanese girl—plenty other girl will see.'

'No, no,' I said huskily, 'I'll never forget you.'

'You say promise?' she asked, coming very close and raising her face to mine.

'Will it please you if I promise?'

'Yes,' she whispered softly, looking at me from underneath the long lashes. I could hear her breath coming and going between her parted lips. Then, for the first and last time, I bent down and kissed her.

With a sudden choke she disengaged her hands. Was it a sob I heard as she turned quickly away? I paused a moment, irresolute, longing to comfort her; then, with a strange tightening of the heart-strings, I left the room.

CHAPTER XXXIV

EXIT KINGSTON

GOING into Kingston's room one afternoon, I found its eccentric owner surrounded upon all sides by devils. He was talking as I entered, and the sound of his voice prevented him hearing me. Closing the door softly, I stood still and looked round the room. It was a regular pandemonium. Milton or Dante would have felt quite at home in it. Devils, devils, devils! They leered at him from the bed, they scowled at him from the sofa, they glared at him from the mantelpiece, and they sat in rows on the carpet and thirsted for his blood.

Happily, Kingston seemed quite unconscious of this concentration of Satanic enmity. As I entered he was busily engaged in measuring a very large devil with a foot-rule. Such a fiend! The wonder was that even a distorted Japanese imagination could picture forth an image so painfully appalling.

'Three foot seven and a half,' murmured Kingston, addressing the devil in tones of affectionate reproach. The monster leered diabolically up in his face. 'What a pity!' he went on; then, after a pause, he

burst out: 'You're the jolliest devil in Japan, aren't you, old chap? But it was real mean of you to grow like this; you might have guessed that your future case was only three foot six. Let me see—h-m-m! if I cut off those horns and dock that scarlet tail? But no! 'twould be a shame to curtail your devilish extremities. Ha, ha! rather good, that! I really believe the old chap thinks so too!' And he leant back and surveyed his friend with an air of admiration.

I coughed discreetly.

'Hullo!' he called out.

'Whatever are you doing?' I asked.

'I'm reviewing my collection.'

'What a hideous——'

'I say, be respectful, please.'

'I always insult the devil when I meet him.'

'Well, I don't.'

'Ah, perhaps you're quite right from your point of view. And now that I think of it, it's as well for you to accustom yourself to this sort of thing by degrees.'

'Well, I do like being with the old boys—they're good company. Now, then,' he shouted, suddenly slapping me on the shoulder, 'let me introduce you to my new devil—Beëlzebub! Isn't he a beauty? I bought him to-day. Look at his teeth; stunning, ain't they? He's the finest devil in Japan.'

'I heard you telling him so as I came in.'

'Oh, did you? I dare say; even devils like to be praised sometimes.'

'What a gruesome crew you've got!'

'A remarkably fine lot, I call them. Now, look at Moloch (he's sitting on the bed)—calculated to give fits, isn't he? And then there is Baal (in the arm-chair)—he's pretty squirmy, eh? But none of 'em can touch Beëlzebub—he takes the cake, I tell you;' and Kingston laid his hand affectionately on the devil's right horn with an expression of justifiable pride on his jolly face.

I looked at the ungainly proportions of the monstrosity.

'How did you get him here?'

'Oh, all right. I got the fellow in the shop to help me, and we dressed him up as a tea-girl. He looked quite pretty sitting beside me in a double ricksha!'

'Didn't people know?'

'Devil a bit! We stuck a veil on, you know; he looked quite ladylike, and—oh, I must tell you!' and Kingston chuckled merrily.

'Go on.'

'Well, old Gordon met us driving past in style. He looked so shocked! You see, I had my arm round Beëlzebub's waist, just to steady him, give him confidence in his first drive, you know. Gordon stood on the footpath looking after us in horror; he was evidently saying to himself, "Oh, Lord! he's at

it again!" I tell you, I nearly died;' and Kingston chuckled again at the remembrance.

I joined in the laugh: Kingston's merriment was always infectious.

'Got any baccy?' he asked presently.

I tossed him my pouch.

'When d'you start for 'Frisco?' he continued, filling his pipe leisurely.

'On the twenty-fourth.'

'In three days! Heigh-ho! how our party is breaking up! Gordon goes to Shanghai in about ten days, and little Caricature has gone. Gad! I'll be left high and dry here; it will be deadly dull without you three.'

'You'd better come with me.'

He shook his head and puffed out an immense cloud of smoke.

'No,' he said slowly; 'not this trip, old man. I guess I'll go home; I've a kind of yearning to see Australia. It takes me in the gizzard sometimes. D'you know, I feel it now; I've a sickening for the sight of a blue-gum, for the smell of a green wood fire, and for the feel of a horse under me. Yes, I think I'll make tracks for the Bush once again.'

The next morning after breakfast Kingston and I were seated in the smoking-room looking over a miscellaneous collection of newspapers. We had the place to ourselves.

I was deep in a leading article, when a smothered exclamation caused me to look up.

Kingston was staring at an old copy of the *Standard* which he was holding in both hands. His expression startled me. Intense interest and breathless suspense were to be read in his face. He was biting his nether lip nervously. Something strange and unexpected had evidently attracted his attention.

'Hullo! what's the matter?' I asked.

He looked up with a start and drew a deep breath.

'No bad news?' I inquired.

'I don't know.' He spoke slowly, almost to himself; then he seized the paper and began reading it again. I looked at him curiously. He was leaning over the table, resting his head on his right hand, his black beard nearly concealed by the collar of his coat. He read eagerly, yet slowly, pointing with outstretched finger to the lines which interested him. As he read the strange expression I before remarked gave place to a look of happiness, of longing, of hope, which was pleasant to see.

'Well,' said I at length, 'don't keep it all to yourself.'

He did not hear me. He was consulting a steamer list, humming gaily the while.

'I can do it!' he shouted suddenly, springing to his feet.

'Do what?' I asked hopelessly.

'Catch the mail-boat to-morrow, of course,' he roared. 'Tra-la-la! What luck! Cheers for Australia! Gad! I must have a drink. Come along. No? Well, ta-ta! see you again, old horse! Tra-la-la-la!'

And away down the passage rang the suicidal strains of 'Bonnie Dundee.'

I picked up the paper, flung on the floor in his impetuous rush from the room. For long I could find nothing to justify his behaviour, but all at once, among the death announcements, I read:

'THOMSON.—August 2, at Rajapooja, Queensland, George Thomson, in his 51st year.'

As I read I understood, for I recalled a conversation at Kobé, when the night was far spent and we had grown confidential—as men will—over drinks, tobacco, and the certainty of one friendly and sympathetic listener. The story which he then confided to me was the one serious romance of his life. He had spoken with an attempt at his customary breeziness of manner; but I, who marked the expression on his face and listened to the tone of his voice, was able to read between the lines, and saw that it was an episode which had touched him deeply, more deeply, indeed, than he could put into words—more deeply, even, than he would ever admit. It appeared that he and the lady in question had known each other in Australia years ago, had been

thrown much together, and had been favourably and mutually impressed. 'You should have seen her,' were his words to me; 'no one in the whole country could touch her on a horse. Such a seat, such light hands! the horses all loved her.'

'Only the horses?' I inquired.

'Well, no,' he answered softly. 'No,' he repeated as if to himself, '*not* only the horses.'

Circumstances separated them: Kingston drifted to South Africa, while she remained in Australia. Time passed. Kingston's poverty and the difficulty he always found in putting his thoughts on paper prevented him writing to tell her that he still loved her. At last an unexpected turn of Fortune's wheel made him a rich man, and he wrote the long-delayed letter. In due course an answer reached him; its contents were short, but to the point. Misinterpreting his silence, she had accepted another suitor, and, as Mrs. George Thomson of Rajapooja, seemed to be for ever removed from the love he had too tardily offered her.

The long, black side of the outward-bound mail-steamer towered above us as we looked up at it from the deck of the tiny tug. The choppy seas, which made us pitch and toss in the most undignified manner, scarcely affected the great vessel; her long, graceful lines bent towards us, then rose upwards with a slow, stately motion while the swirl-

ing waves dashed past, flecking the dripping black of her sides with yellow foam. Her tapering masts and intricate network of rope and tackle showed up against the soft gray of the clouds.

It was scarcely the day for a pleasure trip from a landsman's point of view, but we were bound to see the last of Kingston. He was in tremendous spirits. At times there came a temporary lull in his mad humour, as a passing regret for the friends whom he was leaving came into his mind. But it was only for a minute; the pleasant freshness of the morning, the immediate prospect of novelty and amusement, and—though he did not say so—the new-born hope of a life-dream to be realized in the future, speedily restored him to more than his jolly self. He was indeed a glorified Kingston! Never had I heard his laugh so rollicking, his puns so atrocious, his one song so terribly out of tune.

'When shall we three meet again?' I quoted mournfully.

'I wonder when?' echoed Gordon.

'Oh, stow that, you fellows! you're worse than my devils. Poor old devils! You've promised to be a father to them, Gordon? Don't let 'em miss me, especially Beëlzebub: he has such an affectionate nature! You'll pack 'em up, won't you?'

'Yes, I'll look after them.'

'That's all right. Wo-o, steady on! How this d——d boat pitches! It's a case of heads or tails.

Ha, ha! Tra-la-la! Cheer, boys, cheer! Come and have another drink. No? I thought you looked as if you required spirits. You're as dull as a Scotch Sunday. Their whisky and their power of consuming it are the only things that redeem that race. I don't see why I shouldn't. Hi, steward! bring me another whisky-and-soda.'

'Now, Kingston,' said I, 'you've had quite enough. Here we are, old man; you'll have to go on board. Don't forget us. Write to New York. Good-bye! Give her my love, and, I say! remember my last words are, Good Luck.'

As the great vessel steamed slowly away, we saw him beaming at us over the taffrail. We waved again and again; then the well-known figure faded into the dark outlines of the steamer's sides.

'We must look after the devils,' said Gordon.

CHAPTER XXXV

FAREWELL TO JAPAN

THREE far-sounding whistles had been given, the decks had been cleared of visitors, the mail-bags had been stowed away in the hold, the gangway had been hoisted, the anchor had been raised, and the Pacific Mail Company's steamer *Gaelic* stood out to sea.

With a heavy heart I leant over the stern and watched the little tug, which showed me the kindly face of Gordon no longer, as the distance between us momentarily increased.

It was a lovely morning. The sun was dancing brightly on the blue waters of the bay, the little sampans skimmed to and fro among the more stately merchantmen, and everything seemed filled to overflowing with the joy of life. I felt depressed. I knew that I was leaving one of the happiest periods of my life behind me. Two months! how short a time it seems, yet how much happiness it may contain. Happiness is not measured by time. I thought of my friends. Kingston? He was on the sea, too,

and probably playing at deck-quoits and roaring with laughter, or perhaps getting up a sweepstake on the run. Gordon? Yes, he was thinking of me, I felt sure, and I pictured the poor old fellow returning alone to the hotel, dining alone, smoking alone in the evening, and feeling so lonely that he would be obliged to steal upstairs to solace himself with the silent sympathy of Kingston's devils. Karakamoko? The name touched a tenderer chord. Instinctively my eyes followed my heart towards the land—*her* land.

It was looking its best on that bright, sunny morning, the snowy cone of great Fuji-ama rising high above the wooded slopes of the surrounding hills. The sunlight was glittering on its summit; it resembled a beacon of hope for the coming voyage across the Pacific.

The rock-bound coast and outlying islands, with their fringe of white surf and crest of waving foliage, slowly receded from sight as every throb of the powerful screw bore us rapidly away. Fainter and fainter grew the land, purpling in the distance, till the low outline of the coast, with an indescribable something hovering above it, was all that was left to remind me of Fair Japan. This 'something' was Fuji no longer. Was it a snowy cloud floating in the sunshine? Was it, as the Japanese legends tell, the dazzling countenance of the great god, the

guardian deity of Japan, watching with sleepless vigilance over her fertile plains and mighty mountains? Who can tell? Whatever it was, it slowly faded away till the last faint, blue headland vanished in the horizon and I was once more at sea.

THE END

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